

LEARNING TO LIVE

(Flags on the Battlement)

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A Report of a Discussion about “Learning to Live”

Notes

PART ONE

1

You Can Tell A Man At Once

This story began in the days when the First Five-Year Plan was drawing, to its close.

Where the sunbeams had not yet penetrated the successive layers of mud, chaff, dung and other refuse, traces of winter still remained in the form of crusted ice. But the worn cobble-stones of the station square were warming up, the soil between them was already dry, and a new-born dust billowed in waves behind passing wheels. There was a small neglected patch of garden in the middle of the square. In summer-time its bushes put out leaves to produce a semblance of nature. Now it was simply a dirty place where the bare branches trembled as if autumn, not spring, had descended upon the earth.

A road ran from this square to a small town. The town owed its place on the map to the merest chance. Few people would have known of its existence at all but for the fact that the railway junction where they had to change trains bore its name.

On the square were a few stalls put up in the early years of the New Economic Policy. There was a post office in an isolated building with a bright yellow sign on the doors. Outside the post office languished two nags harnessed to a dilapidated brake. Passers-by were rare on the square, mainly railway workers carrying lanterns, coils of rope or 'plywood suit-cases. A short row of prospective travellers, peasants, sat on the ground against the station wall, warming themselves in the sunshine.

Away from them a boy of about twelve called Vanya Galchenko sat sadly on his own beside a shoeblack's stand. The sunlight made him screw up his eyes. The stand was of flimsy construction roughly knocked together from scraps of wood, obviously Vanya's own handiwork. His stock-in-trade was modest.

Vanya's pallid face was clean and his suit still whole, but both face and suit already bore traces of a wear-and-tear which would later repel kind-hearted folk on the street though attract them irresistibly on the stage and in literature. Vanya still belonged to the category of people who had quite recently been known simply as "good little boys."

From the other side of the garden a youth of those parts emerged. With swift bouncing strides he made straight for Vanya. He cut quite a figure with his hands in his jacket pockets and a lighted cigarette dangling from the corner of his mouth. Hoisting up one of the legs of his new trousers, he planted a foot on the stand and asked through clenched teeth: "Got any tan?"

Vanya started with fright, looked up, made a grab for his brushes and then drooped.

"Tan?" he answered, unhappy and embarrassed. "No, I've no tan."

The youth removed his foot from the stand as if he had been insulted, put his hands back into his pockets and chewed on his cigarette contemptuously.

"No tan? Then what are you sitting here for?"

"I've some black..." Vanya replied, with a hopeless gesture.

The youth kicked the stand angrily.

"It's a sheer fraud!" he said, harshly. "I've some black!" Have you a permit to clean shoes?"

Vanya leaned over the stand and began to gather up his property hurriedly, keeping an eye on the youth the while. But before he could say anything to explain his position he caught sight of a new face over the youth's shoulder. This belonged to a youngster about

sixteen years old, a tall thin fellow with merry-looking eyes and a wide mouth that had a knowing mischievous twist to it. His suit was somewhat old, but it was unquestionably a suit though there was no shirt under the jacket, which was why it was buttoned all the way up with the collar raised. He wore a light check cap.

"Make way for me, "Signor. Black suits me." The youth took no notice of the newcomer's arrival.

"Shoebblack, indeed!" he continued with sickening persistence. "Have you got a permit?"

Vanya lowered his 'brushes. He could no longer avoid the youth's angry look. Somewhere before, Vanya had heard how important papers were in people's lives, but he had never prepared himself in earnest for such an unpleasant question.

"Well?" the youth asked, roughly.

At this unhappy juncture another foot appeared on the stand. It wore a very ancient boot, pale-mud coloured, a—boot that had not known polish for a long time. The youth was shoved aside somewhat impolitely but the words that followed were politeness itself.

"But, really, Signor, you realize that: no papers can be a substitute for tan polish."

Neither the shove nor the polite form of address made any impression on the youth. He flung his cigarette down on the pavement and edged towards Vanya, baring his teeth.

"Let him produce his permit!"

The owner of the pale-mud-coloured boots turned on him in rage.

"You get on my nerves, Milord!" he shouted for all the square to hear. "Perhaps you don't know who I am. I'm Igor Chernogorsky!"

Probably the youth had not known that. He backed away quickly, regarding the other from a distance with some apprehension. Chernogorsky "bestowed a delightful smile upon him.

"Good-bye.... I said good-bye! Why don't you answer?"

The question had an edge to it. The youth made haste to whisper "good-bye" before making off at full speed. He paused for a moment near the patch of garden and muttered something, but by then - Igor Chernogorsky's attention was concentrated on having his boots polished. His foot was back on the stand.

"Black?" Vanya asked, one eye puckering up cheerfully.

"Yes, please. No objections. As a matter of fact I prefer black."

Vanya began to dab one of his brushes into the polish. The heroic encounter between Igor and the youth had been to his liking, but all the same he asked: "Half a mo'! It'll cost you ten kopeks. Have you got that much?"

Igor Chernogorsky's knowing smile broadened.

"Do you ask everyone such, a foolish question Comrade?"

"But have you got ten kopeks?"

"No, I haven't," Igor Chernogorsky replied calmly.

Vanya stopped work in alarm.

"But... er, how much have you got?"

"I've no money at all. None, see?"

"I can't clean your boots for nothing."

Igor's grin stretched to his ears. His eyes conveyed a look of curiosity.

"Yes, you can. Why not?" "Clean them for nothing?"

"Of course. Free of charge. Just try. It'll turn out fine."

Vanya uttered a cheerful little giggle, then bit his lower lip. A spark of genuine inspiration appeared in his eyes.

"Free-of-charge cleaning?"

"Yes. Just try. It'd be interesting to see what it might lead to."

"All right, I'll try. ..."

"I could tell at once that you were the right sort."

"I'll try right away. It'll turn out fine."

Vanya cast a swift ironical glance at his client. Then he set to work with energy.

"Are you a street-waif?" Igor asked. "Not yet."

"You will be. Do you go to school?"

"Used to.... Then they went away."

"Who did? Your parents?"

"No, they weren't my parents ... but... well, they got married. I did have parents before but then..."

Vanya was reluctant to tell his story. He had not yet learned how to turn the misfortunes of his life to advantage. He began to pay special attention to the worn-down heels of Igor's boot.

"Made this stand yourself?" Igor asked.

"Why? Anything wrong with it?"

"It's a fine stand. Where do you live?"

"Nowhere. I want to go to the town. But I've no money ... only forty kopeks."

Vanya Galchenko told all this quite calmly.

The job was done. Vanya looked up.

"Has it turned out all right?" he asked with a smile of pride.

Igor ruffled Vanya's untidy fair hair.

"You're a cheerful type. Thanks. You can tell a man at once. Let's go to the town together."

"Without any money? I've only got forty kopeks."

"You're a funny chap. I didn't say let's go and buy something. I said let's go."

"But what shall we do about money?"

"Look here, it's not money, it's a train you want when you intend to travel."

Vanya reflected. "Yes," he nodded.

"That means we need a train, not money."

"But the ticket?"

"A ticket's a mere formality. You stay here. I'll be "back soon."

Igor Chernogorsky pulled a piece of paper out of the inside pocket of his jacket, examined it closely then held it up to the sun.

"Everything's all right," he said cheerfully.

He pointed to the post office.

"I think that nice little place has some money if could spare. Wait till I come back."

He buttoned up his jacket, straightened his cap and strolled towards the post office. Vanya gazed after him attentively, just a little puzzled.

2

Three Meat Patties

Among the shrubs in the station garden stood a rickety bench. Around it lay scraps of paper, fag-ends and the husks of sunflower-seeds. Here the youth of the shoeblack's stand incident and Wanda Sfadnitskaya have come from somewhere. They may have come from the town, or off the train, but most likely they came out from behind the skimpy bushes in the garden.

Wanda's bare feet were thrust into galoshes and she wore an old check skirt and black jacket, faded and showing yellow patches where the dye had come off. She was a pretty girl but it was obvious that she had already known life's trials. Her fair hair had not been combed or washed for a long time. Indeed, it could no longer be described as fair-Wanda slumped heavily on the bench. "Go to hell," she said in a sleepy, sullen voice. "I've had enough of you."

The youth's knee twitched. He straightened his collar and cleared his throat.

"That's your affair. If you've had enough, I can go." He took a purse from his pocket, searched in it for a long time, passed his tongue over his lips, placed three coins on the bench beside Wanda, and left her.

Wanda laid her arm on the back of the bench and leaned her head on it. Was it in reverie or despair that she gazed at the remote white clouds? Then she nestled her cheek against her sleeve and stared long and fixedly at the tracery of the bare shrubs. She sat like this for a long time until Grisha Ryzhikov sat down beside her. He was an ugly morose-looking fellow with a half-healed -sore on his cheek. He was not wearing a cap but his red hair was combed. His cloth trousers were new, his shirt old and falling apart. He stretched his slippered feet before him as if he were admiring them.

"Got any grub?" he asked.

"Leave me alone," Wanda replied slowly, without moving.

Ryzhikov said nothing but did not appear to be offended. They sat in silence for several minutes until Ryzhikov felt his feet growing numb. He turned round sharply on

the bench. Three coins fell to the ground. One of twenty kopeks, two five-kopek pieces. Ryzhikov calmly picked them up and laid them on his palm.

“Yours?”

He tossed the coins several times.

“Three meat patties,” he said pensively.

Tossing the coins in the air he wandered off towards the station.

3

The Kind-Hearted Grandmother

Igor Chernogorsky went into the post office and looked around. The room was quite small and partitioned by a wooden screen with two windows in it. At one of the windows a long queue had formed, but at the other there were only three people waiting. Above this window hung a sign, which said: Registered Mail. Receipt and Dispatch of Postal Orders.

Igor took his place behind a bent, stout, old woman and scrutinized the “young lady” behind the window. He discovered, however, that she was by no means a “young lady” but a pale, thin woman, certainly no less than forty years old. As he fingered the paper in his pocket Igor reflected that she, unfortunately, didn’t look at all friendly. He was so absorbed in his thoughts about her and his piece of paper that he failed to notice that the old woman ahead of him in the queue had finished her business with lightning speed and vanished.

“What do you want?”

The unattractive woman behind the window looked at Igor severely.

“There should be a postal order here... Poste Restante . . . for Igor Chernyavin.”

She ran her dry finger-tips along a veritable regiment of money orders standing up in a box. She extracted one- of them and held it up to her eyes.

“Is this for you?”

“Yes.”

“Is your name Chernyavin?”

Igor felt a pleasant cool flutter of anticipation.

“To be precise, it is.”

The woman gave him an angry glance. “What a peculiar way of answering. ‘To be precise’! Are you or are you not Chernyavin?”

“Of course I am. How could there be any doubt about that?”

“Show me your papers.”

Igor turned away and thrust his hand into his pocket. He stole a glance towards the door. It was wide open and beyond it was the clear sky and the splendour of freedom. Igor handed his papers to the woman. She read them through from beginning to end, looked on the back and then at Igor again.

“It says here you’ve been sent on official business to the district communications office. Why do you get your money here, then?”

“I was ... so to speak ... passing through this place.”

“So to speak! How old are you?”

“Eighteen.”

“Do you expect me to believe that?”

“How can I help looking so young?” replied Igor diffidently.

“I shall have to speak to the postmaster....”

The woman went towards a small door in the corner. People in the queue behind Igor began to whisper. The open door grew still more tempting.

Igor took a look round. Most of the people in the queue were women. There was one oldish man, a worker, who looked pretty sleepy. Igor put his elbow on the counter and adopted a bored absent-minded pose.

“Chernyavin? What is your address?”

Without moving his elbow from the counter, Igor turned his head reluctantly. The postmaster with his unshaven face looked unfriendly too.

“What?”

“Where do you live? What town?”

“I’m living in Staroselsk.”

“Then why do you have money sent to this address?”

“That’s nothing to do with you,” Igor drawled.

“What do you mean; it’s nothing to do with me?”

“I mean that it has absolutely nothing to do with you.”

“In that case I shall not pay out the money.”

The postmaster spoke decisively, but the piece of paper in his hand was shaking and his eyes studied Igor uncertainly. One of those mind-readers!

“In that case, may I have the complaints book, please?” Igor Chernyavin asked with a supercilious smile.

The postmaster rubbed his unshaven cheek.

“Complaints book? What are you going to write there?”

“I am going to write that instead of giving me my money you ask me stupid questions....”

“Look here, young man!” cried the postmaster.

But Igor, too, began to shout.

“Oh yes! Stupid questions! Why do I have the money sent here? That’s not your business. How do you know it wasn’t sent for my funeral? Or my wedding? Do I have to explain to you why? Either give me the money or the complaints book!”

Some people in the queue burst out laughing. Igor turned. He saw the queue was on his side. One woman said bitterly; "They're always like this. What are they bullying the poor lad for? Perhaps his parents sent him the money."

The postmaster pondered for a moment over (he slip of paper,

"Get a move on there. What's the hold-up?" someone in the queue shouted.

"Very well," said the postmaster, though there was a threatening note in his voice. "I'll issue the money, but I shall make enquiries about you at Staroselsk."

"I wish you would, Signer."

"Give him the money," the postmaster ordered.

And so Igor Chernyavin found himself in the porch, the money in one hand, the Staroselsk papers in the other. He smiled.

"Perhaps his parents sent him the money...."

Igor's soul rejoiced. Above the square gay little clouds were drifting, the patch of garden before the station seemed to be taking deep breaths and making ready to clad itself in verdure. The peasants leaning against the station wall were enjoying their wait for the train. Farther on, Vanya Galchenko was sitting by his shoeblack's stand looking in Igor's direction. Igor folded one white bank-note and put it in his jacket pocket. He pushed the rest of the money carefully into a deeper pocket close to his body. Then he went to Vanya.

"Greetings to you, toiler!"

He drew the white bank-note from his pocket, waved it a little in the air, and said with impressive solemnity:

"This is for you, my boy, for helping me in the hour of need."

Vanya sprang in fright off the big grey stone where he had been sitting. There was a glint of surprise in his eyes. He took the bank-note gingerly.

Igor watched him with a smile. At first Vanya looked gravely at the money. Then his gravity gave way to a look of incredulity. Finally, 'he turned on Igor an expression of roguish understanding.

"And where do we stand now?" he asked.

"Oh, now you can buy yourself all" the polish you want—tan, rod, green, orange...."

Vanya gave a squeal of joy.

"Green?" he echoed. "What would that be for?"

"Well, suppose a crocodile, say, came up to you."

"A crocodile?" the delighted Vanya said. "If d say: 'excuse me, have you any green polish?'"

"Of course it would. Then you'd reply: 'of course, I have. ...'"

"But what happened? One minute there wasn't any money, and the next there's such a lot?"

Vanya looked at Igor quite seriously, but in his thoughtful eyes there danced a keen and merry light.

"You're a funny chap," Igor replied rather nasally, "That's how it always happens. One moment you're broke, the next you're flush. Look at yourself, you started with nothing and now you've got ten roubles."

"Have you been paid your wages?"

"No, my grandmother heard that things weren't going too well with me, so she sent me a hundred roubles."

"A hundred roubles?"

Igor burst into loud laughter. Vanya laughed, too. Then a very practical question rose in Vanya's mind.

"How could your grandmother have a hundred roubles? Why, she can't be working. It must have been your grandfather."

"All right, it was, my grandfather, then. I'll tell you what! Let's talk about our relatives some other time.' Now we'll buy some grub and work out how we are going to reach London City."

This put *ail* end to all Vanya's questions. He was no longer surprised. With tense lips he folded the ten rouble note in a business-like way and hid it in his pocket. There he stood with his legs planted apart; clad in short trousers and a good pair off boots. He twiddled his thumbs and looked down at his working-kit. Then he quickly squatted, shoved his brushes and tins into his stand, slammed the lid and laid his hand on the strap.

The patties were juicy and savoury. One munch was enough to turn them into a tender imponderable lump which slid down the gullet almost without making itself felt. Just sufficient to whet a real appetite.

On Ryzhikov's glum face this had the effect of animating the gleam in his eyes and sharpening his alertness to his surroundings.

There was a queue at the booking-office. The window was shut but about twenty people were waiting there.

Ryzhikov recognized it as the dangerous kind of .queue to be found in the provinces during those years, made up of poor folk who lived modestly and humbly. The most distinguished-looking person in it was a man of average height who was wearing a short winter coat with collar and pockets edged with grey lambskin. Behind him stood a thin vexed-looking woman, one of those who stick to their places in a queue as if there is some very special happiness to be got out of just being there. After her there were more women, all simple folk who kept their slender means tucked into their skirts or their bodices. A dark neatly-dressed girl had her money inside a tightly clenched fist.

Neither station nor queues were suitable for a successful operation. People were on the alert here and what little money they possessed they held on to with both hands. They looked bored, for there were enough tickets to go round and nobody worried about that. So they kept their minds on their money.

Ryzhikov thought of a railway station at a big city. Of course, there were disadvantages there, such as militiamen, sentries and other obstacles. In some miraculous way they knew how to probe Grisha Ryzhikov's most secret intentions. Disregarding his

business-like manner and his look of a bona-fide traveller, they did not even demand to see his papers. They merely said: "Come along, young man."

Ryzhikov reflected how different, too, were the travellers at a big city station. There was so much excitement, so much emotion, and so much real life! There a man would wander for a whole day from one booking-office to another, waiting at enquiry offices, questioning porters and fellow-travellers. He would sit the night through in the station. The simpler type of travellers would dispose themselves on the ground and sleep so soundly that you could rob them not only of their money but of their very souls without them noticing it. More learned people, of course, did not go to sleep but wandered about, wrapped in their dreams... People paid large sums for their tickets there, for they were about to go off on long journeys, and their pockets bulged with wallets, black ones, brown ones....

Who can be happier than the man who has just left the booking-office with a ticket in his hand? He has stood in the queue, quarrelled with intruders, trembled for fear of getting no ticket, listened avidly to all sorts of extraordinary tales and rumours. And now, so happy that he can scarcely believe in his good fortune, he strolls through the crowd in the waiting-room and examines his ticket with dancing eyes, forgetful of everything, his wife, his chief, his suitcase and the wallet he protected so carefully in the queue....

Ryzhikov suddenly grew alert. Behind the last woman in the queue there appeared a hairy man in an old jacket. His boots were of good quality, he wore a green muffler round his neck, and in his hip-pocket there was a nice well-defined rectangular outline of promising size.

Taking his time, Ryzhikov joined the queue behind the man with the jacket. Keeping his eyes on an advertisement he turned sideways to the jacket. A moment later he had two fingers feeling the rough edge of the wallet. He drew the wallet upwards. It moved noiselessly. Another second and ... a rough paw grabbed Ryzhikov's hand and right before his eyes appeared - a face distorted with fear.

"Oh, you scoundrel! Well, I never...." Ryzhikov gave a tug. In vain. His voice rose in a well-studied tone of ominous indignation.

"What do you think you're doing?" he asked threateningly. "You'd better look out!"

"And what was your hand up to?" "Let go, I tell you!"

"No, you don't, my lad!"

Ryzhikov gave an unexpectedly sharp jerk and freed his hand. He rushed through the door on to the platform.

Off he ran along the platform and down on to the track, his feet skimming the ground. He dived under one goods train, then under another. He crouched down and looked around. Several people were pacing up and down the platform. Their heads and shoulders were out of sight, but he at once recognized that pair of good boots and close to them the bottom edge of a grey 'greatcoat and a pair of highly-polished top boots. He heard that excited voice again.

"A real bandit!"

The edge of the grey greatcoat ruffled, the highly-polished boots moved towards him as their owner sprang from the platform. In his light slippers Ryzhikov flashed along the goods trains to the points. He felt depressed but at least his hunger had vanished.

5

Breakfast in the Garden

Igor held two French rolls, a chunk of sausage and a pot of jam in his hands. While they were still in the station he said to Vanya: "Here everything's infested with railway microbes. We'd better have breakfast in the garden. There's such a nice little bench there."

But when they reached the garden they found the nice little bench occupied by Wanda Stadnitskaya. Her face rested against her arm which was extended along the back of the bench.

"Oh! That compartment's engaged," exclaimed Igor.

He 'tiptoed around the day-dreaming girl, a 'little suspicious at first on seeing the galoshes on her bare feet, but when he met her grey eyes, he addressed her seriously and unsmilingly.

"Do you mind if we eat our breakfast in your presence, Mam'selle?"

His polite bow, buttoned-up coat and highly-polished boots made an agreeable impression on Wanda. Though she felt miserable, she managed to assume one of the conventional grimaces of coquetry and even a faint smile.

"Not in the least!"

"Mercy," Igor said brightly, though still with some constraint.

Wanda looked at the boys with surprise and slid to the end of the bench. She had lost interest in the clouds and was now taken up with the more prosaic scene of the station square. Igor quickly laid the food out on the bench and sat at the other end. Vanya rattled his stand, put it down and sat on it, using the bench as a table. He leaned forward with shoulders hunched as he waited for his breakfast.

Igor cut a slice of sausage.

"How are we going to eat the jam, Vanya? Looks like we'll have to use our fingers."

"We'll make ourselves spoons of some sort," Vanya replied, glancing round the patch of garden. "We'll carve them out of wood with our knives."

"Do you happen to have a spoon on you, Milady?" Igor asked Wanda.

His voice had that ultra-polite inflection used by very superior travellers to address each other in wagon-lit compartments. Wanda's eyes lit up with pleasure. However, the most inexperienced eye could clearly see that she was travelling light. Moreover, the sausage had a tantalizing smell. She gulped and looked offended.

"What do you mean?" she minced. "Spoons?"

"Silver ones," Igor explained affably.

Wanda did not reply to this remark. Extending her arm along the back of the bench again, she returned to her study of the clouds. But her eyes were no longer sad and reflective.

Vanya held half a roll and bit big pieces out of it with resolute movements of his whole face, while helping himself with more deference to slices of sausage with two dirty fingers. At the same time he kept his eyes on Wanda. He did not notice her bare unwashed feet, or her ugly matted hair. He only saw the tender pink of her cheek, the corner of an eye and her dark curling eyelashes.

He broke off a hunk of bread, laid two slices of sausage on it and offered it to Wanda. She did not notice. Vanya threw a questioning glance at Igor who was eating with gusto, hands, teeth and knife all hard at work. But Igor found a moment to nod approvingly at Vanya and pat him on the shoulder with his free hand. A little uncertainly, Vanya lightly touched his neighbour's knee. She turned her head towards him, intending to smile coquettishly, but instead of that smile came one that was simple and grateful. Then, taking her time, she began to nibble at the roll. All this went on in complete silence. As he began to cut some more sausage Igor spoke to Wanda. His manner was curt. He did not look *at* her.

"Where are you travelling to, Signorina?"

Wanda turned towards the station and stopped chewing.

"I don't know," she replied, diffidently.

"Come with us," Vanya suggested gaily, swivelling round to Wanda on his stand. "What's your name?"

"Wanda."

"Oh! What a name! Wanda!"

"It's Polish."

"Come with us! He's got a grandfather and grandmother in the city." Vanya's eyes conveyed a glint of irony as he watched Igor. He saw that Igor took the joke well.

But for some reason Wanda did not respond to Vanya's buoyant gaiety. She laid her unfinished sandwich on the bench and clutched at the edge of the bench.

"I don't know ... where to go," she said almost forlornly.

Igor gave her a long steady look and then busied himself with the jam jar. Vanya's high spirits had vanished. In perplexity he studied Wanda and looked at Igor as if expecting to find an answer in his face. Igor hummed a snatch of a song, put the jar down on the bench and said severely: "Wanda, you'll come with us. Then we shall see,"

All became clear to Vanya. But Wanda looked at Igor with alarm.

"I don't know..."

"You don't know, but I do. The train will be in soon. We'll sit in a compartment and discuss everything."

Vanya stared at Igor. What was this about a compartment? Wanda sat in humble silence.

At that moment Ryzhikov peeped out of the bushes. First he took a good look at the group, and then he came forward, stopped and stared at the food. Wanda threw him a look of hatred-

"Been in trouble, Ryzhikov?" asked Igor with a laugh.

Ryzhikov did not reply.

"Have a bite," suggested Igor. "I've always said that of all the professions thieving pays worst. Did they beat you up today? I saw him grab you."

"I got away," Ryzhikov said in a hoarse voice and began to eat.

"Good for you! It's damned stupid. Just think, everybody has a pair of hands and everybody uses them to try and catch you," Igor said with a shudder of distaste. "It's stupid. You ought to try my way." "With granny's help, eh?" asked Vanya. "Granny's the post office. A note arrives: 'Dear Igor,' it says; 'Dear Igor, do please call, and for God's sake draw one hundred roubles.' And if you don't call, along comes another note: 'What's all this nonsense?' it says. 'Why haven't you drawn your hundred roubles? Please come and draw it.'" Ryzhikov turned away hurt.

"Notes," he said. "It's all right when you know how to read and write. . . ."

"Well, if you're illiterate, go and work. Pick pocketing! What could be more stupid?" Igor stuck a piece of bread into the jam. "Work! That's not so bad, either-Lots of people speak well of it."

6

In the Compartment

A long goods train was crossing the steppe. A tractor stood under a tarpaulin on one of its flat-trucks. Wanda, curled up into a ball, lay asleep on a piece-of the tarpaulin which flapped loose. At her feet sat Igor Chernyavin. Arms clutching his knees, he gazed around him vaguely. Ryzhikov, slippered feet planted apart, stood before him. Vanya was dangling his legs over the edge of the flat-truck and admiring the, steppe, the broad country road running alongside the line, the hills on the horizon, the first green of early spring.

They had left the evening before. It took them a long time to settle to sleep, for it was cold. Eventually they got under the tarpaulin, fidgeted, drew themselves in, and, at last, fell asleep. Another good reason for being under the tarpaulin was that it meant that at the train stops they were out of sight of inquisitive people who might disturb the travellers.

"We've got the best compartment," said Igor Chernyavin just before dropping off. "It isn't at all crowded, there's plenty of fresh air and nobody asking to see your tickets!"

They woke up early the next morning' and crawled from under the tarpaulin in high spirits. Only when they passed big stations did they make use of its hospitable shelter again, not for sleeping accommodation any more but solely to avoid giving any trouble to the train's staff. Besides, Wanda felt like sleeping in the sunshine.

Ryzhikov had been silent for some time.

"Why are you dragging Wanda off to the town?" he asked, finally.

“What’s that got to do with you?” Igor screwed up his eyes when he looked at Ryzhikov. Perhaps because behind Ryzhikov, over the top of the next truck, a clean spick-and-span sun was rising.

“Never mind what,” muttered Ryzhikov.

“We’ll find something or other for her to do in the town. Work or ...”

“You don’t intend to work yourself, but you think she ought to, is that it?” Ryzhikov exploded. He was itching for a quarrel.

“Yes, I think she ought to,” Igor said calmly. Turning his back on Ryzhikov, he looked at Wanda in a protective manner.

“Everybody works,” Vanya chipped in from the end of the flat-truck.

“You dry up; chum, if you don’t want to get a sock in the jaw.”

“You can do that only with my written permission, M’sieur,” Igor said nasally.

Ryzhikov slowly turned his head to look at Igor. His eyes were sullen and angry.

“With your permission, did you say?!”

“Yes, and only when it’s in writing, see? ... Hand in your application.”

“What application?”

“Saying you want to hit him in the mug.”

Ryzhikov warmed up and made for Vanya.

“We’ll see about that! We’ll see what it’ll be like without your permission.”

Vanya threw Igor a scared glance, jumped to his feet and ran towards him. Ryzhikov shot out an arm to clutch, him but somehow Igor happened to appear between them. Ryzhikov did not even have time to cast the look of withering contempt he had prepared for Igor, let alone to raise his fists to defend himself. A quick movement of Igor’s fist looked as if it was on its way to Ryzhikov’s face, but floored him by landing unexpectedly in his stomach. Ryzhikov tumbled right over the sleeping Wanda.

“Hey, you! What’s the matter? What are you doing here?” Wanda shrieked in fright as she woke up.

“Don’t worry,” Igor said with a calm smile. “Ryzhikov wants to sleep. Make room for him in the sleeping compartment.”

Wanda turned with a look of distaste towards Ryzhikov but smiled at once. The sight of his contorted face was clearly to her liking.

“You hit him? What for?”

Ryzhikov raised himself on one elbow, his thick lips protruding. Locks of red hair fell untidily over his forehead almost hiding his impudent green eyes.

“What are you jeering for? He won’t stand up for you!”

Wanda moved her head derisively.

“And maybe he will.”

“You...” Ryzhikov was on his feet, his fists clenched.

Igor smiled and laid a hand on Vanya’s shoulder.

“You had better get it into your head, M’sieur, that in this compartment you will not lay *a* finger on anyone,” he remarked, tersely and somewhat reluctantly.

Ryzhikov put his hands into his pockets.

“I see you don’t know just what she is?” he grunted.

“And what is she?” Igor asked, looking at Ryzhikov in surprise.

“Perhaps you think she’s just a kid? Shall I tell him what you are, Wanda?” .

“Go to hell, you toad. Go on, tell him. You’re all swine!”

“She’s a prostitute,” Ryzhikov shouted exultantly. “Got that?”

Wanda went slowly towards the edge of the truck, turned up her jacket collar and drew her tousled head down. Igor moved towards Ryzhikov, but the laughing Ryzhikov jumped nimbly across to the other side of the truck and hid behind the tractor.

It all happened so quickly that Vanya could hardly follow the sequence of events.

Igor went up to Wanda. Looking down at the floor, he asked: “Is it true?”

Wanda turned on him quickly and all the old hatred had returned to her voice.

“What about it? Yes, it’s true! What’s it got to do with you? Maybe you’d like me to be nice to you?”

Igor blushed, pursed his lips and turned his eyes away from the eager glance of Vanya Galchenko.

“Not at all! Only... how old are you?”

Wanda raised her head coquettishly and looked for a moment into Igor’s eyes over her shoulder. “Fifteen. What about it?”

Igor thought for a while.

“Well. That’s all, Signora, you can go,” he said with a sad smile. .

She turned, walked slowly and soundlessly to the tarpaulin, her head drawn inside her coat-collar, dropped down to the floor and lay there quietly, facing the tractor.

Igor whistled a tune as he gazed at the steppe! Far ahead, from behind the sloping hills roof-tops appeared, white in the sunlight.

Down below he caught a fleeting glimpse of a group of bare-foot girls. Their legs, not yet sunburnt, flashed white. One of them’ called something to Igor, making the others laugh. He followed them with a look of indifference and turned away. Vanya watched Wanda, keeping on the alert for Ryzhikov behind the tractor. He went up to Igor, stood on tip-toe and whispered: “Is she crying?”

“It doesn’t matter!” Igor answered sternly, without looking at Vanya.

The truck gave a sharp lurch as it crossed the points.

“Here we are,” said Igor.

The train ran over many sets of points. Lines of goods vans flashed past. Then it swung to the right and ran quickly through the passenger station. Above the coaches standing there the upper storeys of the station building and the curved roofs of the platforms floated by. The train ran out on to a narrow embankment which curved around

a surprisingly broad meadow at the very edge of the town. Beyond the meadow there were whitewashed cottages with thatched straw roofs. But once again the train lurched over points. Then it began to run more carefully as it was drawn into the broad network off the goods yards. The cottages were out of sight now. Red, grey and pink town buildings, ranged on a hill, looked down on to the train.

Wanda stirred on the tarpaulin, sat up and looked towards the town. The train was now moving very slowly through a long narrow passage formed by other goods trains. Igor looked thoughtful as he gazed at the oil-stained surface of the road-bed running past.

Behind him there was a muffled thud. He turned round quickly. A railway guard stood on their truck steadying himself after a risky jump and looking at them attentively.

Wanda slipped away from the truck, silent as a shadow.

“Are you Igor Chernyavin?”

“Yes.”

“Ah! We’ve had a telegram about you. Did you draw one hundred roubles on a forged postal order?”

Igor looked at the guard in admiration.

“Quick work! Did I draw the money? Fancy asking me that! Of course I refused it. . .”

The guard grinned and nodded.

“Come along.”

Igor scratched his nose. .

“Oh hell! It’s a pity, Vanya, we have to part. You’re a good fellow! And Wanda ... the fact is, Comrade Guard, I have no time for you, really.”

“Where are you going?” asked Vanya in a harassed tone.

“Going? I’ve been arrested... in the name of the law.”

“What for?”

“Because of grandmother.”

“Come along, come along now,” repeated the guard, laying a hand on Igor’s shoulder.

Igor gripped the edge of the truck in readiness to jump.

“Go to the colony, Vanya,” he said, turning to him. “It’s said to be a decent place. It’s called the First of May.”

He jumped down, followed by the guard. Vanya sat with his hands gripping his knees, looking after them. He was stunned by this misfortune.

Ryzhikov appeared from behind the tractor. He was smiling maliciously.

“If you please! A note arrives: Dear Igor, please call and draw one hundred roubles! Clean work! But where’s Wanda gone?”

“I don’t know,” replied Vanya in alarm.

“Where are you off to?” Ryzhikov asked when they reached the tram-stop near the goods station.

The street here was cobbled and 'Covered with coal-dust. Innumerable sparrows fluttered up from under the wheels and horses' hooves. There was a queue at the tram-stop. Many people wore boots that just cried out for polish.

Vanya had no time to reply. A man wearing a tunic came up to him.

"Will you clean my boots?" he asked beckoning to the side of the street.

"Do you want 'em blacked?"

"Blacked? Of course! What else do you think? I have to see the chief and my boots. . . ."

Vanya looked around. There was nothing to sit on. A little farther along the street he saw an old wooden porch.

"Shall we go to those steps?"

The man who had to see his chief nodded silently. Vanya ran on ahead to get his things ready. When his client arrived he already had the paste on one of the brushes. . . .

"No, rub the dust off first."

Vanya set to work. Ryzhikov sat on one of the steps higher up and studied the street in silence.

"How much?"

"Ten kopeks."

"Have you change for fifteen?"

Vanya dug into his pocket. He had only four ten-kopek coins.

"That won't work out. Well, never mind, keep the change," said his client.

He had no sooner left than a girl came up and asked Vanya 'to clean her shoes. Then came a Red Army man.

"How much do you want for doing these high boots?" he asked.

Vanya felt alarmed in the presence of the Red Army man. He had never polished army boots before and did not know what to charge.

"Ten . . . ten kopeks," he choked out.

"You fool," whispered Ryzhikov, but the soldier was delighted and put his foot on the stand.

"That's cheap, my lad, cheap. They charge twenty, kopeks for high boots everywhere else round here."

Vanya forgot his usual "Shall I black 'em?" He worked hard, with his eyes, eyebrows, even his tongue on the move. He had not yet learned the knack of polishing quickly with both brushes at once, and one of his brushes slipped out of his hand and went flying away. Ryzhikov gave a loud laugh but did not volunteer to pick the brush up. Vanya groaned, rose to his feet and ran for it himself.

"Smart lad," the Red Army man said and handed him ten kopeks. "Cheap and they shine well."

He walked off, looking at his boots. Vanya's arms and back were aching. He leaned on his elbows and studied 'the street.

The houses were all alike, brick-built, grimy and storeyed. Between them ran short fences with gates in them. At almost every gate there stood a 'bench where people sat nibbling sunflower-seeds. Vanya remembered that the next day was Sunday. People were walking in twos and threes along the brick-laid pavement, talking quietly.

The door behind the boys opened.

"What are you doing here? Street-waifs, eh?" The voice had an unpleasant squeak.

Vanya jumped up and turned round. Ryzhikov rose lazily. In the doorway stood a tall, thin man with a grey moustache.

"Waifs, I thought so."

"No, we're not."

"Ah! So you're a shoeblack. -Have you got a pair of rubber heels?"

Vanya's stand contained two brushes and- two tins of black shoe-polish.

"No, I haven't," he replied with a negative gesture.

"H'mph! And you call yourself a shoeblack! I know your kind of shoeblack! Well, perhaps you are one, after all! But who's this other fellow?"

Ryzhikov turned away. He was annoyed.

"What do you think you're doing here?' Waiting for it to get dark?"

Ryzhikov was still more annoyed.

"Nothing to do with' the dark," he muttered. "Just met a friend."

"H'mph, a friend!"

The old man turned the key in the door and came down the steps. He pointed a gnarled finger.

"You get away from here. I can see what kind of friend you are."

"All right, I'm leaving. Can't a fellow stop in this street? Did you make this rule?" Ryzhikov was aware of his legal rights and was working himself up into a state of grievance.

"If you don't like the rules here you can go to a place where they have better ones," the old man said with a grin. "I'm just going to the shop. If I find you here when I come back..."

He went along the street. Ryzhikov followed him with a hurt look and sat down on the steps again.

"Picking on us like that! 'Waiting for it to get dark,' "he protested in a tearful whine.

A young man approached.

"Here's progress," he said cheerfully. "A shoeblack in our street! And such a nice one! Good afternoon!"

"Shall I black 'em?" Vanya asked.

"Yes, do. Are you going to be here regularly?"

As he dabbed at the tin of polish Vanya shrugged his shoulders. He looked serious.

"Yes, I am!" he replied, after slight hesitation.

This client did not ask the price but without more ado handed Vanya fifteen kopeks.

"I've no change," said Vanya.

"That's all right. I'll always pay you fifteen. Only you must be a bit quicker."

Vanya put the money in his pocket and looked along the street once more. Evening was approaching and somehow this made the street seem cleaner. Vanya was much interested in the tram-car. He had heard a lot about this invention, but had never seen one before and now felt like jumping into one and going off somewhere. He was in good spirits. There was a little spark of pride alight in him. All the passers-by would see him sitting on the steps cleaning shoes so proficiently.

"Listen, Vanya," Ryzhikov said to him. "What if you give me fifty kopeks? I'll let you have it back tomorrow."

"Where are you going to get it?"

"Never mind, I'll get it. I've got to find some grub."

Vanya suddenly felt a pang of hunger. They hadn't had anything to eat since morning, when they had eaten the remains of last night's supper on the train. "

"Fifty kopeks? I don't know whether I've got so much. Yes, I've got ninety. Hey, I'd clean forgotten about the other money!"

"What other money?"

"Igor gave me some of his—er—grandmother's."

Vanya unfolded the bank-note and gazed at it sadly before putting it away again.

"All right, give me fifty kopeks. Look what a lot of money you've got."

"I can't touch that," said Vanya and handed him forty-five kopeks, just one half of all the change he had.

"I'll come back for the night," said Ryzhikov as he took the money.

Vanya remembered with a pang that the night had to be spent somewhere. Somehow this had not entered his mind before.

"Where are we going to spend the night?" Vanya asked, feeling quite disconcerted.

"We'll find somewhere. They don't allow you to sleep in the railway station here."

Ryzhikov went down the street at a businesslike pace. Vanya resumed his seat on the steps, feeling sad. The sun hid behind the houses. People passed him without taking any notice of him. Across the street a group of children were playing noisily on the pavement.

"There's a little shoeblack sitting over there," a spoiled little girl said loudly.

Another girl took a long look at Vanya. Then someone pulled at her and she ran laughing to the gate.

"Vanya, your soup's getting cold," a grown-up woman's voice called. "I've called you twice."

"Once, once, once . . ." the spoiled girl sang.

Vanya rested his head on his clenched fist and gazed across the street. He saw the man with the moustache coming back.

"Still sitting here? Where's the other fellow?"

"He's gone."

"It's high time you were off home, too. Nobody else will have their boots cleaned now. But you bring me those rubber heels tomorrow."

"Is the shop far off?" Vanya asked.

"What do you want at the shop? Cigarettes, I suppose?"

"No, not cigarettes. But where is the shop?"

"Just round the corner."

Vanya gathered up his brushes and tins, picked up the stand and went off in search of the shop

8

Night

They spent the night in a rick not far away. They had only to continue along the street past two turnings, over the level crossing and then a little farther to where the country began. It could hardly be called real country because there were lights still farther on. All the same, beyond the last house there was an open space and grass that rustled underfoot and an isolated rick. Apparently it was on high ground because there was a good view of the lit-up town from there. At the level crossing a street lamp shone with dazzling brightness.

Vanya did not feel keen about spending the night there, and when the last cottage lay behind them, felt sorry he had not looked for shelter in town. But Ryzhikov pushed on ahead confidently, whistling, his hands in his pockets.

"Here we are," he said. "We'll pile up the straw and keep warm. It's near the town, too."

Vanya put his stand down. He did not feel like sleeping, and began to gaze at the town. It was a pleasant sight. The nearest lights were scattered along the broad square. There were so many of them! Sometimes they seemed to be placed haphazardly but elsewhere he could make out an orderly pattern. It looked to him as if they were all part of some game. Farther on, a row of big buildings started and in all these houses the windows glowed with different colours—yellow, green, bright red.

"Wiry is it?" Vanya asked. "Different lights ..., in windows."

"What's that?" Ryzhikov asked as he bent over the straw.

"What makes the windows have such different colours?"

"It's because every one has a different lamp—I mean shade—lamp-shade. The women like them—red shades—green ones."

"Do you mean rich people?"

“Rich and poor. You can make them out of paper. Sometimes you’ll find a lamp-shade and nothing else in a room. Nothing to take. Just a way of making a fool of you....”

“Do you mean steal?”

“We don’t use the word steal, we say take.”

“Tomorrow I’m going to that First of May place....”

“Ah, there’s something to take there. If you’re, smart.”

“Why should I take anything?”

“You are a fool! A real fool! What do you mean, ‘why should I?’”

“Well, going to live in a place and then ... taking.”

“Why not?”

“And get into prison?”

“They have to catch you first!”

“Well, they caught Igor.”

“That’s because Igor’s a fool. Fancy going to a post office! All the same nothing will happen to him. He’s under-age.”

Ryzhikov raked some more straw from the rick, stamped on it and stretched himself out on it.

Vanya said: “There was a guard at our place who died and that lad of his ... he was called Misha . . . he’s at the First of May Colony. He wrote a letter.”

“First of May,” Ryzhikov snorted. “You’d better lie down.”

Vanya lapsed into silence and began to settle down for the night.

The stars in the sky shone brightly. The stalks of straw over Vanya’s head looked like huge black girders.

* * *

Vanya woke early but the day had already dawned. The sun was rising behind the rick and Vanya, who was lying in the shade, felt chilled. He sprang up with wisps of straw hanging to his clothes. He looked at the town. It seemed different now. Some of the street lamps were still alight, burning wastefully, among them the bright one at the level crossing.

The town looked more interesting and complicated now, though not so pretty. However, that didn’t matter. There were Jots of houses and roof-tops and beyond them a high building with white pillars. It was a real town—he must go and see it. He would earn some money and go. He might even go there on the tram. There was sure to be a cinema in the town. Vanya decided to return to “his street” for the morning. He recalled the young man who had been so glad the day before because a shoeblack had come to work in that street. There were certain to be plenty of people wanting their boots polished. What a good thing he had a spare tin of paste. Vanya felt like having a good look at that tin. He bent down. The stand was not there. He rummaged among the straw with his foot. He looked around everywhere. Only then did he notice that Ryzhikov, too,

had vanished. Vanya went right round the rick and came back. Then he looked dully at the town, made another search, leaned against the rick and plunged into thought. Suddenly he remembered something and put highland in his pocket. He searched carefully, and then turned it inside out. The ten roubles were gone.

Vanya took a few steps towards the road, and then stopped. There was no sense in going to the town now.

A whole month had passed since those events.

Early one morning a young militiaman, looking very smart and conscientious, woke Igor up in the reception-room.

"It's time to leave, Comrade," he said. "You'll get plenty of sleep in the colony, but I have to be back by nine o'clock."

Igor pulled his jacket quickly over his shoulders. He had acquired a shirt by now. It was short and made of cotton, but Igor wore its yellowish collar turned smartly over his jacket.

The janitors were sweeping the street with dry brooms, but the dust seemed to rise reluctantly at this hour. The town was bathed in the limpid invigorating atmosphere of a fine morning. Igor found it pleasant to be entering his "new life" on such a morning.

He was not greatly interested in its newness. It was Polina Nikolayewia at the Commission for Juvenile Delinquency who kept mentioning the new life in every other sentence. Igor was fond of life in general without stopping to think whether it was new or old. He never gave a thought to the morrow or to the day that had passed. He was always absorbed in today, studying it like an unread page to be turned over without haste, and scrutinizing its new tales with eyes full of curiosity. This particular day was all the more pleasant because he had had to turn over some very monotonous pages during the preceding month and was even beginning to grow used to the tedium.

He had been brought before the Commission for Juvenile Delinquency on earlier occasions and had found nothing new there this time. He had long been acquainted with Polina Nikolayevna, a small woman with a sharp nose who looked very intelligent and good-natured, and who was sad and polite when she questioned him about his parents and his studies and what, in general, had brought him to this way of life. When she questioned him she no longer looked at the large sheet of paper headed "Questionnaire," as she had the year before, though the questions she put were exactly the same. Igor, too, replied politely. He understood that Polina Nikolayevna was attending conscientiously to the needs of people like himself, that the salary she drew for doing so was rather modest and that she rarely had the pleasure of talking to a decent person. Igor Chernyavin liked giving people pleasure, so he spoke to Polina Nikolayevna in a gentlemanly tone, which, incidentally, required no great effort on his part.

"Your father is a professor, isn't he?" she asked him, tapping her desk with the blunt end of a pencil. "Yes."

"In Leningrad?"

"Yes."

"Why don't you want to go back to him?"

"He's not exactly to my liking. He's rude and hardhearted and he's unfaithful to my mother. I can't live in the same house with him."

"Did you often quarrel?"

"No. I don't like to talk to him at all."

"Don't you feel sorry for your mother, Igor?"

"Yes, I do. Very sorry. But mother doesn't want to leave him,"

"You are such a well-bred boy, Igor. When are you going to give up all these ... escapades?"

"I've got no choice, Polina Nikolayevna! They forced me to go back to father twice. All the same I won't live with him."

"And what if we decide not to send you back to your father this time?"

"I hope it would be all right."

"Would you stop playing your tricks?"

"I hope I would."

"What makes you say that?"

"It's because you've talked to me."

"Are my talks helping you, then?" Polina Nikolayevna asked, with a grateful look.

"I think they are. Very much."

"What am I going to do with you, Igor? I can't go on talking just to you. There are others, you know!"

She pointed with her pencil towards the door beyond which other boys were awaiting their turn in the corridor. Everything about Polina Nikolayevna—her pale sharp-featured little face, her narrow lace collar, even the pencil she wielded so nimbly—expressed how sorry she felt that she could not take Igor by the hand and lead him along the difficult path of life. Igor understood and sympathized with her—he knew she had others who had gone astray to attend to. Apparently his face betrayed his feelings rather plainly, for Polina Nikolayevna lowered her eyes as if she felt distressed and tapped somewhat nervously on the desk with her pencil.

They were approached by a man wearing a white gown. He had unruly hair that grew extraordinarily low down, almost from his eyebrows. The eyeballs, which were covered with tiny red veins, bulged prominently. This man in the clean white gown gave the impression of dragging a load far too heavy for his strength.

"Go into the consulting-room, Chernyavin," said Polina Nikolayevna wearily. "This comrade has to find out what sort of work you are suited for."

Igor had been through this test before, only then the white gown had been on another man. He rose obediently from his seat and took the shortest path he could in the wake of the man in white. Whether this was a part of his new or his old path in life he did not know. It was not a long walk. Igor was placed on a chair in a small room with white furniture. The man in white spoke to another man in white.

"We'll have the Parthean Labyrinth test!"

Igor felt unpleasant cold shivers running up and down his spine. He sat still at the white table and began to muse that after all the time had come to start a quieter life. But he livened up when a big piece of cardboard covered with squares and tracks was laid before him.

The pop-eyed man laid his hands on the table.

“You are in the middle of this labyrinth,” he said dryly, in a voice that quavered slightly. “You have to get out of it. Here is a pencil. Now show me how you are going to get out.”

Igor took another look at these people but gave in without protesting. He grasped the pencil and leaned over the labyrinth with a smile. He ran the pencil towards the exit but soon came up against a dead end and stopped. The sound of heavy blows came through the window. Igor looked out and saw a girl standing on the balcony and beating a rug that hung over a line with a thin rod. He set his mind to work again, thinking “I must do this somehow, damn it.” At that moment the pop-eyed man snatched the board from his hand and replaced it with another. This too was a labyrinth. In one corner there was a picture of a goat, eating some sort of forbidden fruit. In the other corner there was a girl with a stick in her hand. She looked rather like a girl on the balcony. Igor smiled and looked in that direction. Then it occurred to him that before the girl reached the goat much time was going to elapse, during which the goat would be able to gorge to its heart’s content...

“It’s silly!” he said, looking up at the man in white.

“What’s silly about it?”

“Just look! What are these yards for? Why, the goat’s in clover there!”

“If you are going to look around the room, you’ll never get anywhere!”

Igor turned his attention to the board. The goat had a very benign expression. Igor did not feel like scaring it away.

“I’ll tell you what! Let it go on grazing there!”

“What do you mean?” exclaimed the pop-eyed man. “I don’t think it’d do much harm. Just a matter of a few shrubs.”

“But suppose they’re raspberry canes.” “I don’t think they are. You’ve no need to worry so.” “What are you talking that way for?” the man in white asked as he snatched away the board.

“Shall we have the [flute test now?” the other one asked.

“No, we won’t,” the older man replied curtly. He went to the wash-basin. Then he dried each of his fingers in turn very slowly and went to the door.

“Come along,” he called, when he was already in the corridor.

At Polina Nikolayevna’s desk he slumped down on to a chair.

“Well?” she enquired.

“Weak. Very weak indeed. Results nil. Scatterbrained, no initiative, lacking in imagination.”

“What are you talking about? He has much too much initiative, and you say No initiative’! Read this.”

She handed him a thickish folder. The man in the gown held its contents close to his eyes and moved his head rapidly from left to right as he scanned the lines. "This doesn't mean anything, Polina Nikolayevna. We do not know whether it's initiative or just imitative-ness." He gave the folder an angry shake. "Such things do not prove anything," he added.

"And I think that you are wrong. Do please .make another test. You'll find you've made a mistake."

The pop-eyed man rose to his feet looking hurt and walked towards the door of his consulting-room. "Very well, then."

"What are you sitting here for?" Polina Nikolayevna asked Igor.

Igor's eyes followed the white gown until the door had closed behind it.

"Where's the sense in it, Polina Nikolayevna?" he asked in a confiding tone.

"It has to be done," she said, looking at him.

"I don't see why."

"It's a way of testing your capabilities."

"But what for?"

"Go along, Igor, don't argue."

Igor went once more into the consulting-room and stood in silence against the wall. While the white-gowned figures turned over all kinds of files and test-cards and looked into drawers, a deep sense of outrage invaded his soul. Somebody was firmly emphasizing his feeling of loneliness, stirring his memories of the sequence of barren days that had just passed, of that likable Vanya abandoned in the railway yard, of the bright days of childhood lost for ever, of his mother, of ancient grudges ... his quarrelsome, nervy, faithless father and other cold ruthless people.

A long box with compartments in it stood on the table.

"Sit down," the old man said.

All these events came back to Igor Chernyavin while he walked beside the militiaman along the broad pavements, in the bright morning light. Yes, the past month had been a miserable time. A dull, silly time. Polina Nikolayevna kept persuading him to start a new life and the people in the gowns kept placing all sorts of boards in front of him. It had been specially boring after Igor had reconciled himself to his lot and learned how to get out of all the labyrinths and thread the cord through the stops in the flute. At first he was amused at himself as he went through all these tests. The goats amused him. So did the men in the gowns. But later he did the tests with grim technical proficiency. Just because it was so boring he made an effort and even won the praise of the men in the gowns and helped them to test other youngsters. But he did not learn to calculate and assess the results. His teachers let no one into their secrets and concealed their significance behind cryptic phrases likes "tests" and "correlation." Yet it was more interesting to be in the consulting-room than in the reception-room. Igor did not like the noisy shabby crowd of street-waifs with their cheap jokes and low habits. He addressed newcomers in the consulting-room with pontifical haughtiness.

“Well, you won’t get out of here, Signor, until the pike catches that poor little fish!” he’d say, or:

“Look here! Where’s the ball gone? Bring it up to the volley-ball net. You mustn’t throw it over, though. Take it in your hands. So you want to get over the fence? You’d better forget your street-corner habits.”

He would look over the newcomer’s shoulder and cast freezing glances at his unsuccessful flounderings among the tests.

“We’ll never win if we -play that way,” the objects of these experiments would moan sulkily.

“You’re not supposed to, M’sieur. We’re the ones that win on these occasions.”

The only thing that upset him was that his winnings were so ridiculously small compared with those received by the bosses of the consulting-room—just a piece of bread-and-butter free of charge at breakfast-time. His operations in the post office had been much more profitable than this though they did not require such elaborate equipment.

Now, as Igor walked beside the militiaman, he felt deeply embarrassed when he recalled how shamefully flippant his behaviour had been in the consulting-room where his absurd mishap with his “grandmother’s money” had brought him.

However, these pages of his life belonged to the past. The new day was making rapid strides to meet him. They first passed through familiar streets in the centre of the city, then they came to new places— a narrow dirty embankment, a market-place full of carts, then Khoroshilovka where there was a sense of space and of wide skies. The houses were small there with flower gardens in bloom between them. The trams raced by quickly, fussily, gaily.

Then Khoroshilovka, too, was left behind and the road ran on between belts of pale green and the tram lines were on sleepers like a train. The belts of green, the highway, the tram, all led up to an oak grove. And Igor and the militiaman went towards this grove, too. There was a cutting in the woods with a road along it. Across this road hung some wire-netting with gilt letters on it. They read: *The First of May Colony*.

Igor and the militiaman walked briskly through the cutting. The militiaman was pleased at the prospect of finishing his job. Igor was glad, too, for he was on the verge of his “new life.”

They could see roof-tops through the cutting which soon broadened out into a (field, a real sweet-scented field of rye with flowers at its edges. Beyond the field woods stretched in every direction, forming a background to the colony. Two narrow flags hung from tall flag staffs on one of the buildings. There was something peculiar about these flags, so long and narrow, reminding Igor of flags he had seen long ago in illustrations of castles in fairy-tales.

“Do they live in there?” he asked the militiaman.

“Of course they do,” the militiaman replied, surprised at the question. “Where else do you think they would live?”

“Some flags, aren’t they? Just look at them!”

“Yes, those flags are something, they certainly are. Everything here is well... queer! But they’re good sorts here. They’ve got themselves well organized!”

Igor shrugged his shoulders and put his hands in his pockets. But he could not tear his eyes away from the two narrow flags fluttering in the breeze. They were hoisted on flag staffs fixed on two towers that dominated the building.

“It’s got towers like a castle!”

“You can’t compare a plain building like that to a castle,” said the militiaman.

Igor did not argue the point. Yet the towers did remind him of a castle and this gave him a feeling of pleasure not unmingled with doubt, for it had never occurred to him that he would be living in a castle.

When, however, they drew nearer Igor saw for himself that it was really not a castle but just a long grey two-storey building, well-built, with walls that had something twinkling in them and bay windows that rose above the roof-level to form the towers where the flags floated.

Igor and the militiaman walked along the front of the building which was separated from the road by a wide border of flowers. It was a long time since Igor had seen so many flowers. Paths of bright gold sand wound among the flower-beds. Along one of these, close to Igor, two girls were walking, really pretty well-turned-out girls, dear! One of them with a snub nose and merry lively eyes took a long look at Igor and spoke to her companion, who was dark-eyed and olive-complexioned.

“A new boy! Just look at him with his jacket!”

Igor turned away colouring slightly. Really, was there anything queer in wearing a jacket?

People were walking about on the pavement by the front door—older boys and little chaps and girls. Some of the youths were getting dark about the upper lip. Their clothes were a bit mixed but he could see they were meant for work, for some bore oil-stains. The little chaps were in shorts, bare-footed. The girls looked smarter. They always did.

“A posh crowd,” Igor said in an undertone. He smiled at the militiaman, but the militiaman didn’t notice.

At the wide-open doors stood a boy about thirteen, years old with a high forehead and a serious expression, who was noticeable among this quiet yet animated crowd because of his unusual official appearance. He wore boots, cloth riding-breeches with gaiters, a dark-blue shirt tucked in and a black belt with a buckle round his waist. There was a decorative gold badge on one of his sleeves. His broad white collar was dazzlingly clean though slightly creased. He used both hands to clasp the top of the barrel of a real rifle with fixed bayonet.

Igor, however, was diverted from his examination of this figure by other impressions. Two boys came hurtling through the doors and rushed along the path.

“Vaska! Wait, Vaska! I have the keys,” the one behind shouted.

Igor caught some other words too, and though it was not clear what they referred to he had no doubt it was something very dramatic.

“Alexei sent for him and told him to find them.”

“Oh!”

“He said, ‘if you don’t find them we’ll bring it up at a general meeting.’ “

“Oh! Oh! Oh!”

One other thing surprised Igor. On the way down .he .had experienced an unpleasant feeling of suspended expectancy. He thought everybody would make a rush for him, bombarding him with questions, staring at him and badgering him, especially as he was under convoy of a militiaman. And now he felt quite offended, for although there were many people about they all looked as if Igor with his guard simply did not exist. Yet at the same time there was no doubt that everybody had noticed his presence among the (lowers and made a mental note of the figure he cut. An ironical note, Igor felt, as he summed them up as a “spiteful lot.”

At that very moment he received more direct evidence that he was being noticed. Along a near-by path a dark-eyed boy in shorts was walking, whistling and looking around as he went, and obviously with a definite idea of where he had to go. While still some distance from Igor he threw him a brief glance, then looked away, but when he reached him the boy asked:

“Where’s your tie, Mister?”

It took Igor a little time to realize that the question was addressed to him. He looked round. Then it occurred to him that he was dressed in such a way that the question could only be meant for him; the local inhabitants wore clothes that certainly did not call for the addition of ties. But by the time he had grasped all that and looked for the dark-eyed boy, he found he could not distinguish him among the others.

Just then another boy emerged from the building. He looked about twelve and like the others went barefoot and wore shorts.

He was a nice-looking rosy-cheeked lad with just a touch of self-importance. His gait was noticeably confident and buoyant and he cast his large dark eyes around him as if he owned the place. Halting at the edge of the single step of the porch he raised a long silvery bugle, rapidly passed his tongue over lips and, putting the bugle to his mouth, blew a call. It was a short, staccato call³ which ended with a jolly little fancy twiddle. The lad sounded it only once, lowered his bugle, looked at the boys near-by with smiling eyes and suddenly dashed off the step and ran away. At the corner of the building he stopped and played the call again. Igor was dying to know what the bugle call meant and asked the next person he saw.

“That was Begunok playing the signal for work,” he was told.

Half a minute later the only people to be seen dashing through the doors were a few stragglers hurrying after the rest. The lad with the rifle stayed behind.

“Where do we have to go?” the militiaman asked him. “You see I’ve brought... er ... “

The other gave the question some serious thought but could find no suitable answer. “Just a moment,” he said.

Begunok was returning slowly towards the doors with his bugle.

“Call the commander on duty, Volodya.” Volodya understood at once why the commander on duty was needed. Turning his head, he squinted at Igor and went through the doorway.

“Very good... I’ll call him,” he sang out. He passed into the house leaving the lad with the rifle as the sole target for Igor Chernyavin’s questions.

“What if I were to go past you without permission?” Igor asked with a smile. “Would you shoot me?” The sentry glanced at the butt of his rifle. “I wouldn’t shoot,” he replied in a deep voice, “but you’d get a good biff on the nob.”

His words left him a little red in the face and he turned away looking displeased. Igor laughed and went on staring at the sentry. “Oh, you’re a one!”

The sentry frowned back at Igor and then suddenly smiled. But at that moment he caught a sound coming from the cool half-lit vestibule on his right, and, drawing himself up, shouldered his rifle in a flash. A boy of about sixteen came out on the step. He was dressed like the sentry except for a red arm band on his left sleeve. Igor guessed he was the commander on duty.

“They’ve brought someone, Volenko,” the sentry reported, indicating Igor.

Volenko had the lean pale face of an intellectual. His mouth had particularly firm lines with sensitive lips which looked as if they had been specially moulded for pronouncing words of censure.

“Have you a voucher?” Volenko asked the militiaman, with a glance in Igor’s direction.

“Here it is,” the militiaman replied, opening his book. “Sign here.”

Volenko signed and handed back the book.

“Is that all?”

“I think so. . . .”

Igor held out his hand to the militiaman with a smile.

“We’ll not see each other again, I hope?”

“Who can tell?” the militiaman replied with a hint of a smile. He saluted Volenko and set off on his return journey. Volenko, who had been watching the farewell ceremony, turned to Igor.

“Let’s go,” he said.

11

Conversations with well bred people

Igor Chernyavin’s first impulse on entering the vestibule was to turn back. He thought there must have been a misunderstanding and that he was in the wrong place. He cast a look of bewilderment at Volenko and then looked ahead again. Before him stretched a broad staircase, carpeted with crimson velvet. This led to a spacious landing beyond which stood an oak door.

On this door hung a glass plate, bearing the word “Theatre”, in gilt letters.

Beside the door to the theatre hung a huge square mirror reflecting a view of the next flight of stairs and the upper landing which also had a mirror. But the main feature of the picture was a gorgeous ribbon of bright red flowers arranged in peculiar long boxes which stood against the banisters all the way up.

“Wipe your feet,” said Volenko, pointing to a big piece of dark-coloured rag on the tiled floor.

Igor glanced at his boots. There was not a speck of dirt on them.

“They’re clean.”

The sentry approached, rifle in hand.

“No, they’re not. They’re quite dirty. Do what you’re told. Clean them.”

“What the devil?” Igor muttered.

But he scraped the soles of his boots on the rag and then discovered that the reason it looked dark was because it was moist.

“Now go over there,” said the sentry, pointing to a three-sided brush on the floor. He watched Igor with stern attention as he carried out his orders. Volenko waited patiently three steps up at the top of the flight leading to the upper level of the vestibule.

“Is everybody here as serious as you two, Signori?” Igor asked with interest.

A little twitch appeared at the corners of Volenko’s stern mouth. He twiddled a piece of string with a key on it round one of his fingers.

While he went on polishing his boots between the brushes, Igor took a look at the sentry. He noticed how a short tuft of hair escaped from under his embroidered skull-cap on¹ to his prominent brow and twisted therein a curl.

“How old are you?” he asked.

The sentry’s lips moved but he managed to restrain the smile. There was an added touch of severity in the look he fixed on Igor’s feet.

“That’s not your business. Go on cleaning your’ boots!”

Igor shrugged his shoulders.

“Come along, come along,” said Volenko.

He turned down a passage to the left. There was no passage in the other direction, just another door with a neat gilt-lettered sign saying, Dining-Hall. This door opened and a girl about fourteen in a white overall peeped out.

“You haven’t had your breakfast yet, Volenko, have-you?” she asked.

“No, I haven’t. Just leave it for me, Lena. And some for this new boy, too.”

“Of course,” the girl replied as she disappeared behind the door.

The passage had large windows on one side and several doors on the other with big frames containing wall-newspapers or such like between them. At the end there was another door with the sign, Quiet Room.

But it was not this door but the last on the left marked Commanders Council, that Volenko opened. He beckoned Igor in with a gesture.

Igor walked in. The sunshine pouring in through two enormous windows dazzled him, but as he blinked he quickly took in the peculiar feature of this room, its narrow upholstered benches running round all four walls and shaped into curves at the corners. In the right hand corner of this unbroken line of benches Volodya Begunok was sitting, supporting his bugle on his bare knees as he polished it with a rag. Begunok shot a glance at Igor but looked towards a corner of the room as he spoke.

"When are they going to buy some polish? They've talked and talked till I'm fed up! It's real mismanagement, don't you think, Vitya?"

The boy he called Vitya sat at a small writing-desk in the other corner. He rose.

"There isn't enough money just now."

"It'd only cost thirty kopeks..." Volodya retorted. He put fresh effort into polishing his bugle and did not look Igor's way again. Igor's presence was now obviously of minor importance, especially in comparison with the problem of the polish.

But now it was Vitya's turn to take an interest in Igor, for he came out from behind his desk and made straight for him. He, too, wore shorts with a canvas shirt and a narrow black belt round his waist. However, he was no child, but a lad of at least sixteen and, to Igor's experienced eyes, a serious man-of-the-world. In his quick penetrating glance there was restrained irony.

"Is this from the commission?" he asked as he took a bulky envelope from Volenko's hands and tossed it on "the desk. "Yes." Igor bowed to him politely. Vitya returned the bow with equal politeness, but in his gesture there was a subtle trace of mimicry. Begunok hooted with laughter, rolling over on the bench and kicking up his bare feet. Igor looked at them all.

"Igor Chernyavin?" Vitya said as he sat down at the desk and read the writing on the envelope he had picked up.

"What a lot they've written about you."

He did not look in the envelope, but came up to Igor again.

"They've written a lot," Igor said, wanting to dispose of all possible questions, "but the matter was a mere trifle. Just a little mistake in the receipt of a postal order."

"Now look here, chum," said Vitya, looking him straight in the eyes, with a faint smile. "Nobody's the least interested in that mistake of yours. Nobody's interested, don't you see? The point now is are you going to bolt or are you going to stay here?"

Begunok looked up with a slow smile. Igor averted his eyes. He had no wish to run away but he was not going to surrender as easily as that.

"We'll see about that later on."

"That's true enough," said Vitya cheerfully. "Well, let's go in to Alexei Stepanovich."

Only then did Igor notice that the line of benches was broken in one place by a small door bearing the words, Director of Colony.

Vitya flung open this door. Next moment Igor was surprised to find himself in the director's office. Vitya and Volenko followed him in and behind them came Begunok. He

had thrown down his bugle and sneaked in so nimbly that Igor saw him already (here near the desk, gazing at the director, his chin cupped in the palms of his hands.

The director sat at his desk turning the pages of a book. There was nothing distinguished about his appearance. He had a clipped moustache, wore rimless pince-nez, and his hair was cropped short. The eyes he turned on Igor were quite ordinary eyes, grey in colour and rather cold in expression.

“Here we are with a new boy, Alexei Stepanovich,” Vitya remarked pointing to Igor.

Igor bowed politely. Volodya Begunok could not restrain a smile, which remained fixed on his face. Everybody noticed it, including Alexei Stepanovich. But though he knew the reason for it he pretended he had not noticed it.

“What is your name?”

“Igor Chernyavin.”

“Have you been to school?”

“Yes. I got as far as the 7th form.”

“Only the seventh? Not more than that?”

Alexei Stepanovich leaned back in his chair looking dissatisfied. He eyed Igor coldly and critically. Igor, however, who had always felt certain that his education was more than enough for the normal exigencies of life, assumed the director was joking. He spread his hands in a gesture of lively surprise.

“Why?” he objected. “I thought seven forms were a lot.”

“A lot? And what about the eighth, ninth and tenth forms?”

“Well, they’re not for everybody.”

Alexei Stepanovich paid no attention to Igor’s reply. He started to turn over the pages of his book.

“H’m... what’s Dnieprostoi?” he asked in a slow drawl, after a short silence.

“What?”

“Dnieprostoi ... do you know what that is?”

“Dnieprostoi? It’s... it’s... a station.” “What kind of station?”

“A station with a bridge ... and ... there’s a station there.”

Begunok pressed the palms of his hands against his mouth to stifle a shriek of delight.

“I’m sorry... I. was wrong about the bridge.”

Igor could see how difficult Begunok found it to restrain his mirth. Volenko was not smiling only his lower lip was trembling almost imperceptibly.

Alexei Stepanovich shook his head as he gazed at his book.

“You ought to be ashamed of yourself! Really, you ought. You, an educated fellow who has spent seven years at school, and talks such nonsense! You ought to have more self-respect, Comrade Chernyavin.”

“I’ve forgotten, Comrade Director....”

“Forgotten what?”

“I’ve forgotten what Dnieprostroi is.”

“Dnieprostroi is something that you cannot forget! Cannot, do you understand? And there’s another thing... you said that the upper forms were not for everybody. That wasn’t dazzlingly witty of you, either, you know.”

“I said it in the sense...”

“There wasn’t much sense of any kind in what you said. That amount of sense is not at all to my liking. Little sense, you understand?”

Alexei Stepanovich looked Igor straight in the eyes and then Igor realized that there was nothing cold or dull about this man with such an alert and. peremptory expression.

“Yes, I understand,’ Comrade Director,” Igor replied.

“Aha, that’s better! Now you’re saying something much more sensible. One more question. Are you a good comrade?”

There was a trace of irony in Alexei Stepanovich’s yes now as if there was an obvious catch in the question.

“A good comrade?” Igor repeated cautiously.

“Yes. Good or just so-so?”

This question was of a nature that Igor found no difficulty in answering.

“Yes, I am,” he said readily and in a confident tone. “I’d say I’m not a bad comrade.”

Suddenly Alexei Stepanovich smiled. It was a straight friendly smile with something eager, almost boyish, in it, for only on children’s faces do smiles break so easily and frankly.

“Good chap! You know, you’re far from being a fool, I’m glad to see. Well—all right. You’ll learn to know us better. Where can we fit him in, Vitya?”

“There’s a place in the eighth detachment.”

“Good. Then you’ll be in the eighth detachment. Nesterenko’s the commander—a sound man. You’re something of a jester, aren’t you?”

“Just a bit of one,” Igor replied colouring a little.

“That’s not such a bad thing. Many of them in the eighth detachment are a bit too serious. Have a rest and then start there. You’re not going to bolt, are you?”

Somehow Igor did not want to reply: “We’ll see about that later on,” but he remembered what he had said earlier and glanced at Vitya. Vitya replied for him with frank and straightforward assurance.

“No, Alexei Stepanovich,” he said with a faint smile, he’s not thinking of bolting.” “That’s good. Well, Volenko, get going!” Volenko sprang to attention. “Very good. Comrade Director.”

Everybody except Volodya Begunok left the office.

“Alexei Stepanovich!” Begunok exclaimed. He had removed his elbows from the desk.

“Well?”

“We need thirty kopeks urgently for polish.”

“All right. I’ll mention it to the supply manager.”

Begunok stood strictly at attention but his head was thrust forward and ‘there was a look of passionate resentment in his earnest eyes.

“He won’t buy any! Word of honour, he won’t. He’ll say . . .”

“All right. Here’s thirty kopeks for the polish and twenty for your tram-fare.”

“May I go now?”

“Yes, but be back by four o’clock.”

“Very good, Alexei Stepanovich!” said Begunok, in a loud cheerful voice as he saluted hastily. He rushed from the room. A moment later his head reappeared round the edge of the door.

“Thanks!” he cried.

Begunok shot past the sentry in the passage like a bird on the wing, but came back just as fast.

“Where’s the commander on duty? Where’s Volenko?” he asked.

The sentry leaned on his rifle.

“Volenko?” he replied, his brow wrinkling. “He went that way with that funny chap.” .

The sentry showed him the way they had gone. Volodya ran along the tiled passage, turned a corner and came out into a large yard overlooked by several service-buildings. He caught sight of Volenko and Chernyavin in the middle of the yard on their way to the stores. Quite out of breath, Begunok caught them up, stumbled and faced the commander.

“Comrade Commander on duty!” he panted. “Comrade Zakharov has given me leave to go .to town till four.”

“In those clothes?” Volenko asked with a look of surprise.

“No, not like this. I’m just letting you know. I’ll put on parade uniform. I’ll change right away.”

“You go and change,” said Volenko and went on his way without stopping. “Then come back and let me see how you look.”

This time Begunok spoiled his position of attention to the extent of gesticulating.

“Look here, Volenko! I’m not some sort of new boy. Other commanders always take my word for it. I’ll dress carefully.”

“That remains to be seen.”

Begunok wilted. His shoulders fell.

“Very good, Comrade Commander on duty,” he forced out in a gloomy voice and left.

A quarter of an hour later, when Volenko was taking Igor to the bathroom, Volodya reappeared before him.

“May I go, Comrade Commander on duty?”

Volenko was already part of the way up the stairs, but turned round and subjected Begunok to a thorough inspection, straightening his belt, examining his boots, arranging his white collar, against which Begunok's rosy-cheeked face looked extraordinarily handsome. His large dark eyes followed the commander's roving glances. Gradually his initial alarm and confusion gave way to a look of triumph.

When he came to the skull-cap Volenko did not touch it, but exclaimed in indignation:

"I don't understand this fashion of yours. Why do you always wear your skull-cap on one side?"

Begunok's hand went up quickly to straighten his cap. A little of the proud look faded in his eyes.

"Haven't you a mirror?" Volenko continued. "You ought to look in it before you go out. Have you your tram-fare?"

"Yes, I've got some money."

"Show it to me."

"But I tell you I have some. There *you* go again, Volenko. You don't trust me."

"Come on, out with it!"

Begunok opened his small hand at the level of his waist. Two heads with golden skull-caps bent over it.

"Here's the thirty kopeks for the polish and here's twenty for the tram-fare."

"Well, you'd better look out if you don't pay for your tram ticket. I'll find out anyhow. None of your hopping about the tram without a ticket. I know your tricks— always saving up!"

"Look here, Volenko! You know I've never gone in for saving up! You're always the same. You don't trust me."

"I know your sort. . . . You may go. . . ." "Very good, Comrade Commander on duty!" This time there wasn't a trace of grievance in Volodya's voice.

The town was trig and the best street in the town was Lenin Street. That was the street where there was a white building with a pillared front, standing on a little hill. That was the theatre. There were many lovely shop windows in this street but Vanya Galchenko's spirits were low as he strayed past them among the crowd. His socks had gone, his hair grown dirty and matted, his boots were down-at-heel.

The past month had been a difficult one for Vanya. Back there at the rick where he had been robbed and had his feelings hurt he had cried a little and thought a lot. But he could not think of a way out. He was still thinking as he passed the level crossing and went along "his street." It made his heart ache to see the porch where he had been cleaning shoes only the previous day.

That was the beginning of his hard times.

Try as he could, he did not find out where the First of May Colony was. He asked passers-by in the street, but few of them had ever heard of it while others brushed him aside and went on without answering. Vanya too feared to ask the militiamen. He feared the street-waifs, too, and tried to hide as soon as he saw a band of them approaching. All

in all, Vanya found it hard to get used to the crowded, complicated life of the big town. Life in the country-town he came from had been all much simpler and easier.

“Can you tell me where the First of May Colony is?” he asked a young woman who was pushing a pram. “Nobody seems to know.”

“The First of May Colony?” she echoed stopping. “I’ve heard of it. But it’s a long way from here. It’s outside the town.”

“Whereabouts outside the town?”

“That I don’t know. You’d better enquire at the Narobraz.”

The harsh unfamiliar word sounded alarming. Vanya sighed. Town life was apparently much more of a muddle than it looked.

“What’s that?” he asked.

“It’s an office, you know, a building. They’ll tell you there.”

“A building, did you say?”

“Yes, on the main street. Do you remember the name? Narobraz.”

(Abbreviation for Department of Public Education)

“Narobraz,” Vanya repeated.

“You should ask on the main street. Anyone there will direct you to it.”

“Is the name written up?”

“Yes, there’s sure to be a notice-board.”

Vanya felt relieved. But as things turned out he had to spend the whole day on his search. He went up and down the main street several times. The last time he walked slowly, stopping at every door, but though he read every notice-board from beginning to end, he never found the word, Narobraz. At last it occurred to him to ask somebody. An elderly man wearing a hat pointed his cane at a huge building with a broad asphalted space in front of it.

“There’s the Narobraz,” he said. “It’s in the Regional Executive Committee building over there....”

Vanya had noticed this building long before and had read all the notice-boards at the entrance without finding Narobraz mentioned on any of them. But he put his faith in the elderly man and walked back to the building.

He took another look at all the notice-boards in the main entrance to the big building, reading them without particular attention because he was quite sure the word he wanted was not there. Then he remembered that on the other side of the building there was a small porch leading off the asphalted space, and that this had a notice-board over it. He went there and, as he expected, found the board. On it he read: Regional Department of Public Education.

No that couldn’t be it. But from where he stood Vanya saw something really important, though it had no connection with Narobraz. No fewer than four shoeblacks, all boys, sat on the square, while people waited for stands to be freed. Vanya was especially attracted by a fifth stand with two brushes on it. He saw how people stood reading posters and casting eager glances at the vacant stand. But there was nothing to be done: the

shoeblack had apparently gone off for a long time. Vanya walked over to the stand and began to watch the boys at work. The one nearest him, a freckled lad about fifteen with high cheek-bones, worked fast and furious, the brushes flying to and fro in his hands too quickly for the eyes to see. As he leaned forward to polish the heels he stole a glance at Vanya. When his client removed his boot from the stand and put his hand to his pocket for his purse the boy drummed with his brushes on the top of the case and began staring at Vanya. His eyes were bold, full of cunning and self-asserting. They made Vanya feel uncomfortable and he edged away.

“What are you gaping at?” the lad shouted at him.

“D’you mean me?”

“Do I mean you?” the other echoed. “What are you hanging about here for? Maybe you know how to clean?”

“Yes, I do.”

“You’re a liar.”

“But I tell you I do.”

“Well, come on and show us! ... Please, citizen, take that place. Please do.”

“But what if he doesn’t know how to clean boots?” the citizen asked.

“I’ll answer for him. If he makes a mess of them, I’ll put them right myself. What’s your name?” the lad asked, turning to Vanya.

“Vanya.”

“Well, sit down.”

The lad sprang with energy to the empty stand, opened the drawer and pulled out one tin of polish after another, raising their lids and pressing them down again. There was plenty of polish of all shades and even some quite colourless, along with two velvet rags and jars of liquid whiting. He drew out a small brush and a tin of black polish, slapped the stand with his hand and said:

“Get going! You see how many people there are waiting.”

Vanya sat on the stool, spread his legs apart and set to work with a will. On the stand appeared a new boot of good make; the trouser-leg above it was of expensive cloth. Vanya began by flicking the dust off the boot, but the energetic lad shouted at him in a biting tone:

“And you said you knew how to clean boots! Turn up the end of the trouser-leg!”

Vanya looked round at a loss but quickly realized what was the matter. Taking his time, he neatly turned up the edge of the trouser-leg. That done he proceeded with his work. His boss with the high cheek-bones found time to keep an eye on how Vanya was shaping while attending to his own client, and when he was free turned to him again.

“Why did you put so much polish on? They don’t notice, they just say: ‘clean them.’ As a matter of fact, you don’t need to use any polish at all. You just have to rub them over here and there and you’re through. And what did you do?”

Vanya had one customer after another to attend to. He felt happy and worked with a will but his arms and back began to ache very soon and it was a relief when there was a break.

“Hand over the cash!” said the boy with the high cheek-bones, without so much as a glance at Vanya. “I could do with some good sleep! Have you got any papers?”

Vanya had thirty kopeks. He did not particularly want to keep them, but somehow it had never occurred to him that he would be expected to hand the money over. So the demand took him by surprise.

“Do you want me to give you the money?” he asked.

“Who else are you thinking of giving it to?” the lad replied, taking the money and tossing it into his drawer. Then he picked up three kopeks.

“Here you are. I’ll pay you one kopek out of every ten you get. Does that suit you?”

“What do you mean one?”

“A kopek every time, see?”

“You mean, I get one kopek?”

“That’s right, one kopek for your work. You want to be paid, don’t you? But what about your papers?”

“What papers?”

“So you haven’t any? Well, a kopek’s too much for you. What if they come along and ask you whether you’ve got a permit to clean shoes, eh?”

“I’ll tell them *I* haven’t.”

“You’ll tell them! Just imagine that! Then they’ll take the stand and pinch you and take you off you know where.... Keep an eye on him, Yurka. I’m going to get some grub.” Yurka was their neighbour in the row. He nodded.

“All right,” he replied grudgingly.

“And keep a count of what he takes.”

“I’ve no time for that. You keep it yourself.”

“All right, don’t bother, I’ll find the money anyhow if you try to hide it. I’ll find it, see?”

He stood up in front of Vanya and now, on his feet, he looked taller and bulkier. His trousers were made of good cloth, his boots new. His nagging and bullying threats made Vanya feel awkward.

“I shan’t hide anything,” he said turning away.

The lad with the high cheek-bones went down the street. Yurka turned on Vanya.

“Taking the job at *a* kopek!” he said harshly. “That’s the kind of scum that’s hanging about now.”

Vanya did not reply. Yurka looked him over a few moments more, thought for a while, then spat contemptuously over his stand.

“He caught a fool! For a kopek!” he said to the shoeblack on his left.

A client came up. Yurka rattled his brushes.

"This way, please, citizen. Let me polish your kid boots!"

The citizen, however, did not appear to like Yurka's familiarities, perhaps because his boots were far from being kid ones, for it was on Vanya's stand that he raised his foot.

"He's a waif, he can't clean boots. You'll be sorry you went to him."

Yurka's presence made Vanya feel nervous and ill-at-ease. There was a frown on his brow as he finished the job in a mechanical, spiritless manner and dropped the ten kopeks into his drawer. Yurka watched him contemptuously.

"Spirka's a swine, he exploited me a whole summer," the last shoeblack on the left called out. He was a tall, clumsy, dull-looking fellow. "A whole summer. All the same, he was paying me three kopeks."

"The rate ought to be five," said Yurka.

Customers were arriving in shoals and the conversation was cut short. Vanya was not even given the time to stretch his back as foot after foot appeared before him on his stand and the coins piled up in the drawer. But he no longer felt the joy his work had given him before he had lost all interest in the faces of his clients, and attended to them in silence. At last he grew so tired that the brushes scarcely moved in his hands. He dropped them more often. Spirka returned with a cigarette between his teeth.

"Here comes a first-rate shoeblack!" he shouted, when he saw the line of people waiting. "This way, please."

For the next half-hour all five worked to deal with the queue. Vanya's forehead was moist with perspiration and he felt a pain in his chest. When the last client tossed a coin to him he did not even pick it up but left it lying on the pavement.

"Hand me the till!" said Spirka.

Vanya handed him the silver coins without bothering to count them.

"Fine! One rouble sixty kopeks! That's good! Have you got any more?"

"No." "Come on now, turn out your pockets."

Vanya did as he was told.

"That makes sixteen kopeks for you. Here you are. Well, you see, you've been given your pay."

Yurka, who was sitting with his hands on his knees, turned his eyes on Spirka. They were blazing with indignation. The faces of the other boys showed that they, too, shared his feelings but it was only the last one in the row, the clumsy dull-looking fellow, who voiced that feeling.

"You're a pimp, Spirka."

Spirka turned towards him with a threatening-gesture.

"What's that? What did you say?" The lad did not repeat his accusation but Yurka associated himself with it by adding with a smite:

"Didn't you hear what he said? It's true. Do you know what they call what you're doing?" "What?"

“They call it exploitation! Yes, exploitation! How dare you pay him only one kopek! Only, the bourgeois do things like that, the exploiters!”

Spirka whirled about on the pavement in his fury, casting piercing looks at Vanya, but it was on the last fellow in the row that he vented all his indignation. “How much ought I to pay him, then? He can’t clean. Just look at the amount of polish he uses. Didn’t you see? Pay him yourself, Garmider, if you feel so sorry for him. Go on, pay him the whole ten kopeks, if you want to!”

Garmider’s face retained its apathetic expression. He turned away without saying a word. It was Yurka who kept the ball rolling.

“Garmider’s not an exploiter; he hasn’t got an extra stand.”

“Ah, so that’s it. He hasn’t got an extra stand and neither have you! That gives you the right to talk! But it’s I who have to buy the polish. And what about the cost of the brushes? And the velvet? Did you pay four roubles for the stand? It’s all very well for you to talk!”

Yurka spat.

“Yes, it’s easy for me, I have my own stand. Why don’t you work just for yourself too. But you have a second stand, that’s what’s called exploitation.”

“Exploitation! Exploitation! You go on like a parrot! You might be a Young Pioneer! Well, nobody’s keeping him here, let him go where he likes. He’s got no papers, either. He’s only to get pinched and there goes my stand and all!”

Once again Yurka spat. He rose to his feet, stretched himself, yawned.

“Just as you like. But we’re not going to put up with it. Pay him five kopeks out of every ten he gets.”

Spirka’s yell could be heard all along the street.

“Five kopeks?”

“Yes, five.”

“Five kopeks when he hasn’t even got any papers.”

“Well, if you’re risking your stand, say three. You used to pay Garmider three. Give him the same.”

Spirka gave in suddenly, stopped shouting, laughed and patted Yurka on the shoulder.

“All right, I’ll pay him three. What are you getting so worked up for?”

“Right, you pay him three.”

“I said I would, didn’t I? I was only joking when I said one. Thought I’d see how he worked first. What’s more, he might have bolted. What should I want with your exploitation? Let him work for himself. I was only having a bit of fun and you go and make a regular political meeting out of it.”

Spirka kept up his laughing for quite a long time as he went on looking at them all with his sharp eyes. Garmider paid no attention to him, his dull gaze fixed at something far off. Yurka wore a knowing smile and was back at his stand.

“Why are you putting on that act?” he asked. “We know your game. You’ve had that stand lying idle for a whole month. Along comes a fellow, anybody else would’ve been glad to get him, if he’d any sense, but all you do is to be mean to him and offer him a kopek.”

“You’re crazy! Me mean? Why, I was only joking. Come on, Vanya, we’ll work it out absolutely fairly. You made thirty kopeks the first time, then one rouble and fifty kopeks.”

“Sixty,” Yurka interjected.

“All right, sixty. That makes nineteen times at ten kopeks a time. Here’s another thirty-eight kopeks—an extra two kopeks a time. You’re getting a whole fistful of money, see?”

Vanya had sat listening on his stool while all this had been going on. The sudden importance of the problem raised by the shoeblacks impressed him. It was not long since Vanya had been at school, in the fourth form; and there he had learned about the October Revolution, the defeat of the bourgeoisie, the Civil War. Vanya believed all those events had happened long ago, yet suddenly he discovered himself to be a victim of exploitation, and Spirka appeared before him as something other than a shoeblack, somebody whose very company was loathsome. However, when Spirka pushed the thirty-eight kopeks into his hand, Vanya was glad to discover that there was another side to the picture, for now he found himself with fifty-seven kopeks and still plenty of time before him till evening. .. Today he would eat nothing else but a wonderful, juicy, tasty sausage with a soft roll for his supper. It was with great satisfaction that he bent over the next shoe that appeared on his stand. And Spirka made one more condition.

“You’ll have to carry the stand home yourself. I’ll not carry it.” Vanya gave in without any resistance.

14

A Word Difficult to Understand

Vanya worked for Spirka (or three weeks, sometimes earning a rouble a day, sometimes more. He made enough to pay for his food, but it was hard work and he grew very tired by evening. Then there was the additional task of putting the stand away and going to Spirka’s place for it in the morning. Spirka, fortunately, lived near the goods yard, -not far from the rick where Vanya was spending his nights.

Meanwhile, Vanya grew more friendly with Yurka than with any of the other lads. Yurka was a fellow who knew his way about and had picked up much knowledge about life. Although he was an orphan, he did not sleep on the streets but rented the corner of a room off some woman. He thoroughly approved of Vanya’s intention to get to the First of May Colony, but lost no time in disillusioning him.

“It’s a good place, but they won’t take you there.”

“Why not?”

“Do you think it’s so easy? There are heaps of boys in this city all wanting to go there. I was there myself once.”

“You were?”

“Yes, I was. Last year. I was at the dead end, and I hadn’t a stand, either. So I went there. I’ve no use for them now. I like living this way better because — well, they’re so strict with their ‘very good, very good,’ all the time. Some fellows I know are there. All the same I’ve no use for them.”

And Yurka added point to his feelings by spitting in his masterly manner.

“I’ll manage to get along without them,” he said.

“Do you mean they don’t take people in there?”

“They haven’t the right; you’re supposed to go to the commission.”

“What commission?”

“It’s a place called the Komones.”

“Where’s that?”

“Just round the corner. But they won’t let you in.”

“Won’t let me in where? In the colony?”

“No. In the Komones (*Komones—Commission for Minor Delinquents*). I went there but they didn’t let me in.”

Vanya, however, snatched a free moment to run off to the Komones. It was, in fact, just round the corner. His visit was over in no time. He only managed to sneak into the passage; and a moment later he was back on the steps with the bald-headed porter¹ watching him through the half-closed door. Their exchanges began while he was still inside and reached a climax in a very short time. Vanya swung round quickly to face the door, hunched his shoulders and shouted in a tearful voice:

“You’ve no right to do this.”

The porter did not express any opinion on the matter of his rights; he limited himself to issuing orders.

“Get out of here!”

“But I want to go to the First of May Colony!” “You do? Well, they don’t take the likes of you here.”

“Whom do they take?”

“Law-breakers, see?”

“What sort of breakers did you say?”

“Better than your sort. Otherwise we’d have all kinds of rabble getting into the colony. The idea of it, letting anybody who wanted to get in there!”

“But I’ve nowhere to live!”

“Nowhere to live, did you say? Why, that’s nothing! That’s a matter for the Spon.” “What’s the Spon?” (*Social and Legal Protection of Minors —the first letters of the Russian words spell Spon*)

“That’s the name of the place. Spon. Now be off!”

The porter slammed the door.

“Spon!” Vanya echoed.

He went back to his work in a very upset state of mind. Yurka spotted him from afar.

“What did I tell you?” he shouted.

Vanya sat down on his stool, picked up his brushes. A client already had his foot on the stand. Yurka was giving the finishing touches to the elegant boot of an officer, but did not let the subject drop.

“So you thought they’d make a rush for you and say: Please make yourself comfortable, Comrade Galchenko?”

Vanya said nothing till he had finished his job.

“He said I ought to go to some place called the Spon,” he resumed.

“Who told you that?”

“That bald-headed fellow there. The Spon, he said.”

“Just a minute. Spon? I’ve got it. It’s in the Narobraz. I know the Spon. But there....” Yurka shook his head and Vanya saw that he had nothing but the utmost contempt for the Spon.

“What’s wrong with it?”

“Oh, there—No, you’d better keep away from that place. It’s all a lot of bosh.”

Spirka’s attitude to talk of this kind was one of icy disdain. He lei his clients come and go, smoked, whistled, winked here and there. So far as he was concerned the Spon did not exist.

“That’s the Spon over there,” Yurka indicated with a nod towards a near-by door. “But they won’t take you in there. They’ll only tell you to go to the reception point. All bosh!”

Vanya made his way to the Spon the next day. He passed through the door Yurka had shown him, climbed a narrow, dark staircase and came into a corridor that was just as dark. There he found many doors which opened and shut as people passed in and out; behind their plywood panels he could hear voices booming above the clatter of typewriters. Shabbily-dressed callers with dirty boots sat along benches in the corridor with bored expressions on their faces. Vanya walked the full length of the passage, reading all the signs.

“It’s about the Spon, you see ...” he said on his return to one of the people waiting.

“Well, what about it?”

“What is the Spon?”

“The Spon’s the Spon. Go in there.”

He pointed to a door. On it Vanya saw a notice which read: Social and Legal Protection of Minors.

Vanya read it again. He turned round in bewilderment.

“Is that the Spon?”

“You still don’t believe me, young fellow! Read the first letters of each word.”

Vanya read the notice once more. To his delight he saw it was all quite clear. He opened the door and went in. Four women and a man sat in the small office, all writing. After a cautious look at each of them Vanya addressed a small woman with large dark eyes.

“Good morning.”

The woman glanced up at him but did not lay down her pen.

“What is it you want, boy?”

“I’m looking for the Spon.”

“Well, this is the Spon, so what is it you want?”

“I want you to send me to the First of May Colony.”

There was more interest in the woman’s manner now. She laid down her pen and turned smiling eyes on him.

“Is that your own idea?”

“Yes.”

“Impossible. Somebody put you up to it.”

“No, nobody did. I’ve heard it’s a good place.”

The dark-eyed woman looked at the other women. They responded with tight-lipped smiles.

“I should say it is. Are you a street-waif?”

“No, I’m not.”

“Why do you come’ to us, then? We only deal with waifs.”

“I don’t want to be a waif.”

“H’m, I can see you’ve got quite a lot of sense in your head.”

“Why shouldn’t I have?” asked Vanya, with his head on one side.

“Yes, I can see that, too.” The women exchanged glances again.

“Well, that’s enough. Run along,” said one of them. “.”But I...”

“We don’t send people to the First of May Colony. That’s a job for Komones.”

“Is it?”

“Yes. They send law-breakers to the colony.”

“I’ve been to Komones. They throw you out there.’ They’ve got a man there—a bald-head.”

“Yes, they’ve got someone to kick you out. We haven’t though otherwise you wouldn’t still be here. Do what you’re told, stop bothering us.”

The young man at the desk in the corner rose to his feet.

“It’s your own fault, Maria Vikentyevna,” he grumbled. “What’s there to talk about? You begin arguing with them yourself and then you ‘can’t get rid of “them. It’s quite impossible to get any work done here.”

He left his desk, went up to Vanya, gripped him lightly but effectively by the shoulders and turned him round towards the door.

“Out you go!”

Out in the corridor Vanya re-read the sign on the door.

Social and Legal Protection of Minors.

Then he read the first letter of each word. Yes, it certainly spelt Spon. But it did not make as much sense to him now as it had a quarter of an hour earlier.... Three weeks later there was another calamity. A young man with a brief-case walked up to the shoeblacks and asked to see their permits. It was all Spirka’s fault for not putting Vanya in the middle of the row. Had that been the case, as people of experience told *him* later, he could have slipped away. But Vanya’s place was at the end of the row, so he was the first the young man asked for his permit. Vanya sat in fearful science, as the-man with the brief-case stood over him.

“Put your things together,” the man said.

In his helplessness *Vanya* looked appealing towards Spirka, but Spirka was behaving in a very strange way; he was gazing blissfully around the street his eyes brimming with pleasure.

“What are you looking about you for? Pick up your stand,” the man said.

“It’s not mine.”

“Isn’t it? Whose is it, then?”

“Spirka’s.”

“Ah, Spirka’s. Are you Spirka?”

Spirka’s shrug was that of a man whose honour had been offended.

“Yes, I’m Spirka. But this has got nothing to do with me.”

“Whose stand is this, boys?”

They said nothing at first, but Garmider spoke up at last: “We oughtn’t Jo let Vanya down. It’s Spirka’s stand all right. The stuff’s his, *too*.”

“You go to hell! Why are you all turning against me? I sold you the stand, didn’t I? Why don’t you say so?”

“But you never did sell it to me!”

“Nothing doing, Spirka,” Yurka said smoothly.

Everything was now clear to the man with the briefcase, and Spirka, too, saw that all his little system was doomed. The man added only two words: “Come along!”

Spirka let out a breath-taking oath, raised his arm and struck Vanya on the ear. Garmider dashed in to the rescue but Spirka managed to land a violent kick on his stand. Coins and tins of polish were scattered on the pavement while Spirka calmly walked off along the street with his hands in his pockets. The man with the brief-case looked round for help but it was slow in coming.

“Bunk!” Yurka whispered to the harassed Vanya. And Vanya barked.

Ten minutes later he stopped in a deserted street lined with willows. He thought he was being chased. He looked hard at the end of the street but saw nobody there; near-by there was only a white dog crossing the street. It looked at Vanya somewhat suspiciously but when he walked on, the dog put its tail between its legs and bolted.

Vanya had only twenty-two kopeks; he had left the day's taking in the drawer of his stand. Days of loneliness and hunger set in again. The twenty-two kopeks helped him to keep going for two days, but then things grew really bad, especially as the weather turned against him. There would be bright sunshine in the morning but at two o'clock dark tumbling clouds would gather and by evening storms would sweep over the city. There were several very heavy downpours with thunderclaps and then a cheerless drizzle would set in until daybreak. This went on a whole week. The first night Vanya was drenched in his bed of straw. He did not expect it to rain the next night and was drenched once more. He was afraid to spend a third night in the rick and kept on walking through the streets, dodging the rain under porches and up against the doors of houses. Thus he found his way to the station.

It was quiet there. The waiting-room had just been swept, and the damp clean tiles, with patches of sawdust here and there, glistened under the bright electric light. There were a few passengers dozing on the long benches. Two Red Army men were having a snack, taking tasty-looking food out of a linen bag— that lay between them. They broke a pink-crust roll in two, and the pieces looked dazzlingly white and fluffy. They laid half-a-dozen eggs on the bench and one soldier used his knee to prevent them rolling on the floor, while the other cleaned and sliced a salted herring on a sheet of newspaper. Then they picked up the fish carefully with two fingers and ate it. Vanya took a few paces towards them. The soldiers looked at him.

“Hungry, eh?” one of them said with a grin.

“I’ve no money.”

“That’s bad. A waif, aren’t you?”

“No, I’m not”

“Never mind. Come and sit down with us here.”

Vanya sat down on the bench opposite. They placed a fine helping beside him—half a roll, two slices of herring and an egg. The soldiers offered him the food without a word. They disposed of the contents of their haversack like friendly partners but were just as sparing of talk between themselves as with Vanya. A railway guard approached them.

“Is this—er—traveller with you?” he asked, pointing to Vanya.

“For the time being, as you see, he’s with us,” replied the older and darker of the two soldiers.

The guard looked down at Vanya’s supper in a way that showed he was not convinced.

“Somehow he doesn’t quite fit in.”

“Don’t you worry; he’ll fit in all right.”

The guard left them. The soldiers did not blink an eyelash. They just went on eating, and did not say one word to Vanya till they had quite finished their supper. Only when

the linen bag had been tied up and the newspaper with its crumbs and litter thrown into the waste-basket did the younger one speak.

“Well,” he said. “Let’s call it a day.”

15

The Silver Coin

Vanya fell asleep there on the station bench. Because of the presence of the two Red Army men on the opposite bench, the guard did not disturb him until morning. But when he did at last wake Vanya up, the soldiers had gone. The guard looked at him in silence; Vanya, just as silent, realized that it was time to be off.

He made ‘for the main street for he wanted to find out what was happening on the pavement near Narobraz, and, besides, had made up his mind to pay another visit to Spon and have a talk there about the First of May Colony.

Although there was something purposeful about the way he walked, Vanya felt low. The man who sat at the farthest desk in the Spon office cast a rather gloomy shadow on life.

A boy wearing a gold-coloured skull-cap came out of one of the shops, it was Volodya Begunok. Vanya was so (fascinated by the skull-cap, the sleeve badge and Begunok’s lively dark eyes that he bumped into a wooden railing round a young tree.

Begunok had a tin of polish for cleaning the bugle in his hand: He examined the label on the tin with close attention as he stood in the shop entrance. Then he put the tin into his pocket. As he withdrew his hand he dropped the coin for his return journey. It rolled straight to Vanya Galchenko’s feet. Vanya bent down quickly and picked it up. Begunok looked at him in expectation. Vanya handed him the coin.

“It’s my tram-fare,” Volodya said with slight embarrassment as he took the coin. “It’s a six kilometre walk.”

Vanya smiled politely, reflecting that his own troubles were of a much more serious nature.

“Six kilometres?”

“Yes, back to the First of May Colony,” said Volodya with a vague gesture.

Vanya almost fell on Volodya in his surprise.

“First of May, did you say?”

“That’s right.”

“You’re really from the First of May Colony?” Vanya could not restrain his joy. He laughed. Volodya smiled back at him, for he was proud of his high status.

“I’m a colonist. Look, this is our uniform,” he said, raising an elbow. On a ‘rhomboid-shaped velvet patch on his sleeve there was embroidered a golden figure “1” with *the* word “MAY” across it in silver thread.

“I so much want to get there...,” Vanya faltered.

“Are you a street-waif?”

“No, I’m not. I’ve tried so hard ... but nothing happens. Nobody wants to send me there....”

Vanya was in deadly earnest. They were standing in the middle of the pavement with the passers-by bumping into them. Begunok was the first to notice how inconvenient this was, and with a frown look Vanya’s arm and drew him aside.

“I’ll tell you what...” he said. “Our Commanders’ Council is very strict. They’re real devils, those commanders! They’ll say there’s no room for you. They’ll ask why we should have you. No, you’d do best to go to the commission called Komones.”

“I’ve been there. I’ve been to the Spon. I’ve been everywhere,”

“Didn’t she want to help you?”

“Who?”

“That woman there. Wouldn’t she take you?”

“No, she wouldn’t, and the man they have there just pushed me out too. It’s said to be for real law— er—law-breakers. Are you a law-breaker?”

Volodya kicked the wall with the toe of his boot, dropped his eyes and smiled.

“That’s ‘Something the people there have worked out for themselves. Law-breakers! All that’s just trash see? It doesn’t make any difference at all what kind of law-breaker you are. Our people say it isn’t fair.”

Begunok pondered for a while, casting an unseeing look up and down the street. Perhaps the problem was beyond his powers to solve. The frown remained on his brow. At last he set his mouth firmly and tossed his head angrily.

“You know what?” he said. “To hell with them! You come along next Saturday. We’ll ask them to do it. I’ll speak to my commander. He’s a fine chap, our Alyosha Zyriansky! Do you think you’ll manage to find the colony? You have to go through Khoroshilovka.”

“Oh, I’ll find it.”

“Take this ten kopeks. It’ll do for a roll.”

Vanya took the coin.

“But what about the tram? Are you going to walk?”

“Walk! I like that! Why should I walk? I’ll take the tram, but, you know, for nothing.”

“Without a ticket?”

“Of course! It isn’t allowed, but what can I do about it? I’ll change trams so the conductor won’t notice me.”

Vanya smiled.

Begunok saluted formally.

They parted. Vanya was calculating how many days remained before Saturday while Volodya Begunok visualized Volenko, the commander on duty. And it became quite clear to him that he would have to return to the colony on foot.

The Sharks of New York

It did not take Igor Chernyavin long to complete his routine visit to the doctor, the bath-room and the barber's shop.

"This is for your parade uniform," Volenko explained, as Igor's measurements were being taken in the tailor's shop.

Together with Volenko he went to the store-room where the old storekeeper supplied him with "school uniform," a working overall, boots, shorts, a skull-cap and a belt. Some of the new things he put on, the rest he had to carry in a bundle.

"Wait here till five o'clock," said Volenko 'after leading him to the Quiet Room. "I can't let you into the dormitory because the eighth detachment isn't in.

They're all at work. And they'll not have time to bother about you in the dinner-break."

Up till then Igor had found the proceedings easy going. Nothing had happened to irritate him, while the commander's rather dry reserved manner had even impressed him. Perhaps for that reason he was unpleasantly surprised by Volenko's instructions.

"Have I got to stay here? Can't I go out?"

"Of course you can. Only you won't be admitted to the second floor or the other buildings as you haven't yet been enrolled in your detachment. You're a new boy and nobody knows who you are."

"But I'm wearing colony uniform."

"That doesn't make any difference. You stay here till dinner-time. Then, after dinner, we'll go to the school for your examination."

Volenko left. Igor placed his overall on a bench and decided to get acquainted with the Quiet Room.

It was a spacious handsomely decorated hall with more of those long continuous benches like the ones in the Commanders' Council room along its walls. At the narrow end of the hall there was a place where the line of the benches was broken by a small raised platform covered by a carpet. Here a bust of Stalin stood on a marble pedestal, while the wall behind was decorated with portraits and pictures of scenes from Stalin's life. There were portraits and pictures in other parts of the hall too. Igor spent a long time looking at them. He was pleased to find everything about this hall so well and solidly made. The pictures were under glass and framed in oak. The floor was laid with parquet which looked as if it had been polished that morning. There were little octagonal oak tables arranged near the benches, with upholstered chairs placed around them.

Igor's attention was drawn to a long row of small portraits on one of the side walls—grown-ups, young people, little chaps. He easily recognized Volenko among them, but the rest of the faces were unfamiliar. On his tour of inspection Igor reached a large mirror. He had not yet had a chance of seeing himself in the clothes, described by Volenko as "school uniform," which he had put on in the bath-room. Now he was confronted by a ruddy-cheeked young man wearing long cloth trousers, a narrow black belt drawn in tightly, a well-tucked-in shirt of dark blue close-textured material with a wide collar open at the neck. All this¹ was to Igor's satisfaction, though he felt it was a

pity that his under vest had no collar, which meant he could show nothing white, and he regretted that his hair had been cropped with clippers. Igor's head was of a somewhat irregular form; when his hair was cut short it made him look a bit of a noodle. He had noticed, however, that many of the colonists, including Volenko, wore their hair long, and he assumed it was permitted.

Igor was fond of his own face. What pleased him especially about it was the way it kept slipping into a knowing smile and the bright glitter of his small and slightly narrowed eyes. But now it seemed to him that something had altered in his face, without, however, reducing its attractiveness. Could it be growing more serious, or was there a new surprised look on it? Igor could not very easily decipher the change though he felt sure he could detect something new in his face.

He sat down on a bench and plunged into thought. Well, it was obvious he was going to live in this First of May Colony! How long would he stay? One year? Two? Three? He didn't yet feel like bolting. He'd had two years of the "free life." Money had come his way easily, he'd made a few worth-while friends, but for some reason he'd got little fun out of it. He had long since become bored with the cinema, the sweets, the sausages. More than anything else he had grown sick of having nowhere to live. Wherever he slept, in stations, out in the stubble in the fields, in doss-houses or thieves' dens, it was all equally repulsive. The best suit he could buy as the result of some successful operation soon turned into filthy rags.

Things hadn't turned out properly. Most of the "free" people like him had vaunted such rags. That didn't look well; it bore no relation to that life of elegance, sparkling with wit and success, which looked so splendid in American films. There was a time when Igor had been attracted by those fantasies of reckless valour, the glitter of talent and audacity, duels with detectives who were no less gentlemanly, no less elegant and audacious than their foes. In real life, the devil only knew why, things had been quite different. No matter how brilliant an operation Igor might carry out, it never brought the detectives on his trail. One ordinary fully-armed sentry or a militiaman in uniform was enough to catch a whole shoal of "sharks of New York" in the railway stations and doss-houses. And after that came the conversations with Polina Nikolayevna and the pursuit of those hideous and really quite innocent goats. No amusing adventures in life of that sort! No motor-car chases, missing wills, secret documents, stunts, blondes with revolvers pointed at masked men. Nothing—except Americanized day-dreams. Igor felt no inclination now to go back to that world.

And what kind of life did the colony offer him? He had been provided with an overall which meant he was going to be made to work. Igor had nothing against honest labour, but he had never done a day's work himself and had no wish to start. But in the colony, of course, they were proud of working. All the same, they really ought to differentiate between those who enjoyed working and those who didn't. Igor belonged to those who didn't, though he was prepared to have a shot at it. The devil only knew, perhaps they would make him into some sort of turner. On the other hand, they would send him to school. Of course that director Zakharov knew his job. Igor had no objections to education, especially higher education, but he had not liked being at school before, he had not cared for the well-meaning but uninteresting teachers with their nagging ways. And he had not liked the noisy, disorderly crowd of half-baked school kids.

Igor went on thinking for a long time, but reached no decision. Everything lay ahead of him like an open question. The case of his mother was the most open of all questions. He had not considered it for some time, for he did not feel like struggling towards the maze of life's contradictions to solve it. The question of his mother, damn it all, was one that could be shelved until the distant future, though the thought crossed his mind that she would have been happy if he were to visit her in the parade uniform of a colonist and greet her with one of those firm and restrained salutes they made so well at the colony. But his eyes [fell on the overall lying with silent eloquence on the bench. The overall brought with it a whiff of a very complicated uninteresting future.

Well, there had been some marvellous and exciting days packed with danger and risk! But what did this day hold in store for him? Here he was sitting in this beautiful cage guarded by some snotty Petka Kravchuk with a rifle in his hand. A fine "shark of New York" he was! Today it would only take a schoolboy's penknife to gut a shark like that.

It was with a gloomy face that Igor met Volenko when the commander on duty arrived to take him in to dinner.

17

A pleasant conversation

After dinner, Igor Chernyavin went to the school where he was received by an old teacher. Or did they have some special title for him too in the colony?

The teacher's study was a large pleasant room with rugs on the floor and heavy partly-lowered curtains at its tall windows. The old teacher chose a shady corner for the talk. A big sofa, two arm-chairs and a small table stood in it.

Igor liked the look of the teacher. He wore his jacket buttoned right up, his shirt collar was spotless and he was close-shaven. There was a curl to his grey moustache, the result of habitual, skilful attention that even had a touch of swagger about it. Igor was reminded of a professor in some American film. Above all Igor liked his polite way of speaking.

"Igor Chernyavin?" the teacher began. "I was expecting you. Sit down, please."

He laid his hand on the back of a chair and when Igor sat down, took a seat on the sofa next to it.

"My name is Nikolai Ivanovich," he said, leaning forward slightly. "We must clear up one or two points about you. Alexei Stepanovich tells me you've had seven years schooling, but I suppose that was some time ago. Certain events in your life, shall we say, interrupted your studies."

His eyes rested on Igor with an unspoken question. Igor sat bolt upright, laid his hands on his knees and paid close attention.

"That is so. I haven't studied for two years."

"Tell me, please, Comrade Chernyavin, did you study well?"

"Not always."

"I suppose it depended on various incidental causes and that you were not handicapped by any lack of ability?"

“Oh, I had the ability....”

“May I suggest that you write something? It’s highly important that we should know how well you can write. Please! Here’s some paper and a pen and ink. What can I suggest? Well, let’s try this, if you don’t mind? Something short, very short ... you’re from Leningrad, aren’t you? ... Well, write down what you like most about Leningrad—the streets, the bridges, or the parks, perhaps? Do you think you could manage that?”

“I’ll try.”

“Do. And, meanwhile, I shall get on with my own work.”

Nikolai Ivanovich smiled, gave a little nod and sat down at his big desk in the middle of the room. The subject appealed to Igor. There was really something in Leningrad to remember. He often thought about his native city with sadness. His mother lived there.... And apart from that, Leningrad was a posh place, more to his taste than any other city.

Half an hour later Igor handed Nikolai Ivanovich a page of writing. The teacher put on a pair of big horn-rimmed glasses and pursing his lips, started reading Igor’s composition. He smiled when he finished and then read it through again.

“Very good. Nicely done and interesting. Just one mistake and that not at all important. The word column is wrongly spelt. It should end with an n.”

“Really?”

“Yes, but it’s quite possible that you might have forgotten that. And how about your mathematics?”

Igor coloured and did not answer. In the same polite manner Nikolai Ivanovich asked Igor to divide a fraction by a fraction. Igor stared at the sum for a whole minute but did not pick up his pencil. Nikolai Ivanovich glanced at him over his shoulder from his seat at the desk.

“What’s the matter? Have you forgotten how to do it?”

“Yes. Fancy that! I’ve clean forgotten.”

Igor rose from his chair. He too could provide an object lesson in politeness.

“I won’t put you to any more trouble, Nikolai Ivanovich. I know how to write but I’ve forgotten everything else, algebra, biology, politics of every sort. I’m afraid it’s too late for me to study.”

Nikolai Ivanovich searched his pockets for his glasses, found them on the table and looked at Igor through them with surprise.

“What a strange remark, Comrade Chernyavin! How can you say such a thing? What’s there so difficult about it? It’s perfectly natural that you should have forgotten. So we’ll freshen up your memory. Now sit down again. Why did you jump up?”

He seated Igor in the arm-chair again and moved his own chair so as to sit opposite him. He patted his knees, looked out of the corner of his eye at the brightly-lit windows and began: “Now this is the programme I propose for you. The school year is nearly over. There would be no sense in enrolling you now. So we’ll do this—we’ll put you straight into the eighth form next term. But, mind you, you’ll have to study during the summer. I

strongly recommend you to do that. You have plenty of ability, you ought to study. Agreed?"

"Well, I could agree, of course. You see, I'm really grateful to you. I should like you to realize that. Only...well, I may not stay here till the autumn. I may not like the colony."

"Do you mean to say you might leave the colony?"

"Yes."

Nikolai Ivanovich peered at him over the top of his spectacles.

"Where would you go?"

"I'd decide that later."

"We've never known a case of anyone leaving like that. Only a very foolish and neglected person would leave a place like this. I am positive you won't leave, Comrade Chernyavin."

Igor found this old man altogether charming with his trimly curled moustache and rosy cheeks. As the teacher spoke his eyes glowed and when he paused in search of the right phrase, his glance slid to the side. He did not simply chatter but chose his words thoughtfully and deliberately, yet at the same time in an effortless way that Igor found most attractive. He talked mainly about the importance of education, about the path that lay before young people in the Soviet Union and how much merit was attached to taking that path, how human personality grew in the course of study. He was entirely absorbed in the case of Igor Chernyavin. He respected him and thoroughly enjoyed expressing this feeling of respect; and for that very reason Igor was reluctant for this conversation to end stiffly and wished himself to be just as sincere and earnest.

"I haven't acquired the habit of working, Nikolai Ivanovich," Igor said. "I've never worked in my life."

"That may well be true," replied the teacher with a calm smile. "You haven't lived very long yet. You have acquired few habits."

"But what if I don't get the habit at all?"

Nikolai Ivanovich linked his fingers over his stomach and laughed benevolently.

"Why shouldn't you? It's such a pleasant habit."

"Pleasant?"

"Naturally. Very pleasant. Now I've worked for forty years, and do you know, I still like it."

"Oh, but you're a teacher."

"Well, if you want to be a teacher that's a splendid idea. But many people think that teaching's a most disagreeable kind of work. That's all nonsense, of course. Work of any kind is a very pleasant activity. That you'll find out for yourself."

"I'll try," said Igor as he rose to his feet again.

"Yes, do try. You will be helped here. We have some good boys here."

"Thank you, Nikolai Ivanovich."

“Well then, when can you start your studies?”

“Will the 1st of June do?”

“Good, Let us start on the 1st of June. I’ll put your name down.”

Igor bowed to Nikolai Ivanovich and his bow was returned cordially and considerately. There was no Volodya Begunok present to grin at the conventionally polite manners of the well-bred people.

Igor walked into the courtyard and looked around helplessly. He felt an urgent desire to run up against something which would arouse his anger or indignation-, something which would make him want to protest, or at least something he could make fun of. Things could really not go on like this! From the morning onward he had been left to himself, with some inscrutable, assertive yet courteous force pitied against him. At five o’clock he was to be enrolled in the detachment. Would the detachment handle him in the same calm way?

18

A Conversation not to everybody’s liking

At five o’clock Volenko entered the Quiet Room with a tall burly youth who had one of those exceptionally good-natured faces which belong only to very mild-natured, easy-going people.

“Comrade Chernyavin!” said Volenko. “This is your commander Nesterenko.”

For the first time Volenko allowed a touch of humour to enter his tone of voice. There was faint irony in his glance and in the way he pointed to Chernyavin.

“I’m turning him over to you in full working order: cropped, clean and complete in every detail. There’s his overall. His parade uniform has been ordered. If you please!”

Volenko, it was quite obvious, had had enough of Chernyavin and was relieved to hand him over to the detachment commander. The latter grasped this fact and bowed to Volenko with the -same touch of irony.

“Thank you, Comrade Commander on duty. You may rest assured that next time I shall prepare one for you.”

Volenko saluted and left the room.

Igor sensed the warm friendly spirit of this ceremony with its combination of formality and light-hearted humour. It left no doubt that Volenko and Nesterenko were good friends who were rubbing in the point of a joke with their comic, slightly ceremonious bows. When they were playing this game Nesterenko was not at all the soft-hearted fellow he had seemed to be earlier. He had an attractive light baritone voice and you could tell that he knew how to use it. In his approach there was a trace of slow Ukrainian humour. Igor noticed he had the same military bearing as Volenko.

Nesterenko’s play-acting came to an end as soon as Volenko left.

“You’ve been detailed to the eighth detachment. The detachment is now assembled. Let’s go!” he said, on his way to the door.

Igor stopped him.

“Comrade Commander!”

“What do you want?”

Igor picked up his overall. His face wore the same expression of helplessness which it had shown when he was in the courtyard. He looked towards the windows, unable to keep that mischievous twist from his lips. “Are you studying, Comrade Commander?”

“Do you mean at school?”

“Yes.”

“Well, in the first place, the answer’s yes. I’m in the tenth form. Secondly, don’t call me Comrade Commander. There’s no need for that here. You can call me Vasya.”

“Can I really? I heard Volenko being called Comrade Commander on duty!”

“That’s different. The commander on duty is a very important person here. He’s in charge of the day’s programme. When he’s wearing an arm band you can’t talk to him without saluting first.”

“Why’s that?”

“It’s like this.... Didn’t you notice how much trouble he took with you today? He has an awful lot to do. If everyone were to start arguing with him he would never have time to get anything done. Besides... what sort of things are there to argue about with the commander on duty?”

“It’s all right to argue with you, though?”

Nesterenko shrugged.

“Yes, only it’s not the custom here.”

“And you don’t have to be saluted?”

“Sometimes. You’ll learn about that later. Come on, we’re, keeping the detachment waiting.”

. They passed the sentry, another lad now, and went up the stairs between the boxes of flowers. On the top floor, the passage was just as well lit as below but instead of tiles there was a parquet floor, as shiny as in the Quiet Room. They stopped outside a door which bore the sign, Eighth Detachment.

Nesterenko paused with his hand on the door-knob.

“We have two dormitories with eight beds in each,” he explained. “The other one is next door.”

The dormitory turned out to be a big room. It had eight well-made attractive-looking beds painted in buff shade with cherry-red blankets on them. They were all faultlessly tidy. Nobody sat on them or even stood near them. The boys, over a dozen in number, were gathered round a large table. Igor noticed a bench against the wall, a very long one like the other benches to which this colony seemed to be partial.

All heads were turned towards Igor and Nesterenko as they entered the dormitory. Nesterenko halted just inside the door and spoke with a touch of formality, in which, nevertheless, Igor could detect a little, unobtrusive fun.

“Accept your new comrade. Here’s Igor Chernyavin, with my recommendation.”

They did not rise but shifted their chairs as they drew more closely together round the table and made room carefully for the two newcomers. Nesterenko took a seat and patted the chair next to him as an invitation to Igor to follow his example.

“Sit down.”

There was a sudden hush as everybody waited with interest for what was to come.

“When a new boy arrives it’s our custom to gather the whole detachment together so that the commander may do the introductions,” Nesterenko said with a hint of laughter in his eyes. “We’ve done it that way in the colony for a very long time it’ll be about five years now. On such occasions the commander has to tell the full truth about the comrades, just what he really thinks without any spoofing. Some day, when you’re a commander, Chernyavin, you’ll have to do it too. So that’s why they’re looking at me this way, you see. They know I’m not going to pull my punches.”

Nesterenko delivered all this unhurriedly and affably. He spoke in a sing-song tone with slightly stressed “o”s.

“Get going, Vasya, don’t keep us on tenterhooks!”

This came from the youngest member of the detachment, a tow-headed boy of about fourteen with the neat, clean, intelligent face that often betokens a naturally gifted scholar.

“Rogov can’t wait. He knows he’s in for it.”

“All right, but do get on with it.”

“We have another custom loo,” Nesterenko continued. “Nobody must argue or get offended. Anything the commander says—goes. And the new boy, say you, Chernyavin, mustn’t get uppish. You’ve got to learn how to speak the truth and how to listen to it too. See?”

Igor gaped. His face had lost the last trace of studied meanness.

Nesterenko began by singling out *a* grown-up looking youth who must have been at least eighteen. His brow was low and his stiff hair unruly. But though his face was featureless and his lips full, it was all the same an energetic, mobile, pugnacious-looking face.

“Here we have Misha Gontar. Misha’s a fitter, a good fitter. The trouble is he doesn’t want to learn in school. He’s reached the fifth form and has made up his mind he’s learned enough. Crazy, so we have to make him study. He’s all right as a comrade. As a matter off fact it would be a good thing if they were all up to his standard in that respect, but he’s slovenly. There’s nothing to be done about it. You can’t learn anything worth while from him there. Wherever he turns he breaks something or makes a mess of things. He’ll set off to fetch something and forget what it was. He ought to shave every day ‘but, as you see, he hasn’t done it for three days. And lives in a children’s colony, mind you! He’s to blame that our detachment can’t get good marks for cleanliness, though it’s a good detachment. He puts on his overall in the morning, stays a bit in the shop—I told you he’s a fitter—and comes barging into the dining-hall with it on. There, of course, the Sanitary Commission kicks up a row and all that counts against the detachment, you see? When Misha’s on duty we take him in tow as if he were only a kid. He’s got another weakness, he doesn’t like to be in the rank, can’t keep in step, and his parade uniform

hangs on him like on a scarecrow. Of course the whole detachment feels very badly about this because, after all, it's such a trifle and all the same he doesn't correct it. But he's a good fitter and a good comrade too. He's good-natured and likes to work. Except for that bit- of nonsense he'd be a real man. He wants to become a lorry-driver and, of course, every lorry-driver has to have some education. Now on top of all this he's fallen in love. And how can we have that when it takes the whole detachment to brush his hair—and even then we can't get it to lie smoothly!”

Nesterenko, who delivered all this with great relish and conviction, kept glancing at his companions. They, however, watched Misha and it was obvious they were in general agreement with their commander's estimate of his character. Misha himself seemed to concur; he did not even raise a protest against the revelation that he had fallen in love.

“Now we come to Pyotr Akulin.”

The unsmiling Pyotr Akulin did not budge from where he sat askew on his chair. His lean plain face with its bucolic ruddiness did not seem capable of smiling.

“Akulin's the best turner in the colony and he's at the top of the eighth form. He's tidy in his work, respects discipline and he's a first-rate Komsomol member. One day he'll be an airman, that's certain. Like all the rest of us he has a work-chest. We never lock our chests that are not our way here. Well, three days ago Akulin fixed a padlock on his chest, which was a rotten thing to do. He's either afraid - of being robbed or he's got something to hide, I don't know which. But anyway, it's wrong to start using locks, in the colony. It's another matter in the workshops. State property ought to be kept under lock and key for the sake of order, but here in the detachment we're all comrades, so what do we want locks for?”

Akulin did not turn round to face Nesterenko. He laid his arm on the back of the next chair and replied in a quiet, unexpressive voice:

“I didn't lock it because of my comrades.”

“We know that. You've figured out that because there's a vacant place in the detachment they'll send us a new boy and that he'll stick his hand into your chest. Of course he will if he sees it has a padlock on it. And why do you think the new boy's bound to be a thief? What does it matter what any of us used to be in the old days? Chernyavin's a new boy too, but you see him sitting here with us and you can tell for yourselves -that he's not going to go snooping into a comrade's chest.”

Akulin moved his arm off the chair. .

“I'll take the lock off,” he said, in a hoarse voice.

The detachment, which had been holding its breath in suspense, heaved a sigh. It was not exactly a sigh but more like a stir expressing relief.

“Next we have Alexander Ostapchin, deputy-commander of the eighth detachment of the First of May Labour Colony.”

You could at once tell from the ceremonious way the commander described Ostapchin's rank that he was a popular figure in the detachment and that they were on bantering terms with him. Alexander himself, hearing his name called, winked, turned towards the commander and rested his chin on his fists. Ostapchin had fine dark liquid eyes.

“As a man he’s perfectly all right and he’s not a bad turner either, and he’s in the tenth form and deputy-commander and so on. Yes, he’s a real man, only there’s one thing wrong with him—he blabs. Oh, how he likes to blab! He could get on without food, I think, as long as he had a chance to talk. Once he starts on a topic and his tongue begins to wag, it runs away with him, he can’t get it to stop, and what’s more, he can’t keep it running on the right lines. He doesn’t pay heed to anybody, it’s all the same to him whether it’s a friend or a stranger or just somebody who happens to be there, on and on he’s sure to rush. The whole detachment isn’t enough to hold him back. He dreams of becoming a procurator. But what’s the good of a procurator who doesn’t keep a check on his tongue? A procurator must not say idle words and, what’s more, he should think twice before opening his mouth. Our Alexander always needs a nanny to catch him by the back of his trousers.”

Ostapchin was neither embarrassed nor offended. He went on staring at Nesterenko with a friendly smile that had a touch of impudence in it. He even seemed pleased to have such an interesting foible and retorted with something of the manner of a spoiled child.

“What have I ever said that I shouldn’t?”

“Don’t you remember when that woman came to us once from the Commissariat of Public Education? You nearly had her in tears with the things you were blabbing out.”

“I told her the truth.”

“The truth? Then, it was ill-timed. She came here to find out something about how we live; perhaps she wanted to learn something herself. In other words she was well disposed to us, while you, with that speech of yours—why, you fell on her like a ton of bricks, telling her the public education authorities didn’t understand a thing about their job and were making a hash of everything and weren’t worth the money they were being paid. She asked afterwards who on earth you were. I told her, of course, not to take any notice of what you’d said because you were only a new boy who didn’t know any better yet.”

The colonists roared. ‘Ostapchin turned away in confusion but even so his eyes retained their glint of a smile.

“This is Sancho Zorin! As for him—well, you can see for yourself what kind of chap he is!”

True enough, Zorin’s nature was as plain as the sun at noon. His first act after hearing his name mentioned was to perch on the chair with his feet in the seat. The commander’s tone was at once kind and severe.

“Why have you put your feet on that chair? He’s going to take you in charge, Chernyavin. He’s been waiting a long time for you. He will look after you till you get the title of colonist. He’ll teach you everything there is to learn and will then recommend you for the title of colonist at the general meeting. Saticho’s hot-tempered, but he’s not always quite lair-minded. If he gets a pinch of salt on his tail there’s absolutely no holding him back. But don’t pay any attention to that.”

Igor nodded and took a keen look at Zorin. Zorin nodded in return and his whole face was lively with meaning. It was a sharp, alert, quick face that responded immediately to every impression and was alive with questions and answers. Now, in some miraculous way it managed to convey to the commander that Zorin appreciated his words of truth

and would try to be less hot-tempered, that he realized how much the detachment liked him and returned that affection, and that he would help Chernyavin to become a good colonist and that Chernyavin need not feel shy. That face told more about Zorin than anything the commander could put in words.

Nesterenko turned to the remaining six who were all youths between sixteen and eighteen. He gave them all credit for being good workers, splendid comrades and colonists, but drew attention frankly to each one's shortcomings, smiling sometimes, choosing and polishing his phrases carefully, without, however, robbing them of their sting. Which was penetrating and sharp. Sergei Listvenny was condemned for being too much of a book worm, this being advanced as the reason for his going about "like a lunatic." Khariton Savchenko, a high-cheek-boned, fair-haired and rather awkward-looking boy was labelled "flabby." Boris Yanovsky with the curly brown hair had a tendency to hedge and not speak the truth. Vsevolod Seredin was a fop. Danilo Gorovoy was said to be unapproachable and too cold-blooded.

Everybody listened in silence to the commander's words and no objections were raised. But when he had finished they all burst out laughing as they reminded each other of the most damaging details in their character-portraits and begged Nesterenko for additional tit-bits. Nesterenko, however, soon stopped listening to them.

"What's all the shindy about? Let's finish," he said. "You seem to have forgotten you came here to meet Chernyavin."

"You've talked about us but what about yourself?" cried Ostapchin. "When I'm commander I'll have something to say about you."

"Then I'll wait till you're commander. You can discuss me then, though I don't think you'll have anything clever to say. Accept Chernyavin."

"Oh! We've done that already! Shake, Chernyavin!" Ostapchin shoved a hand out. "Sancho, be off with you, put him to work! Look, he's fine stuff to make a Komsomol member out of."

All eyes were on Igor. He seized his opportunity.

"Signori! You know, I'm really very -grateful to you for accepting me. Only there's one thing, you know—the comrade commander has told everything about you all so shouldn't I say something about myself?"

Several of the boys smiled. Akulin looked suspicious, while Gontar did not conceal his disapproval.

"That isn't our way of doing things," said Nesterenko. "A new boy doesn't talk about himself. You've nothing to say anyway. We shall see for ourselves what kind you are. One other thing, there's no need to call us signori, see?"

"I see, Comrade Commander. My mistake, Comrade Nesterenko."

"Come here, Chernyavin." Zorin was "waiting for him in one corner of the room. "This is your bed, here's your bed-side table and all your things. You'll get soap and tooth-paste from deputy-commander Ostapchin. You can take it easy for a couple of days and then start working. I'll tell you the rest this evening. What form are you going to be in?"

“The eighth.”

“Fine. I’m in the eighth too. Well, now you’re a free citizen! You can go where you like!”

Sancho made a sweeping gesture towards the window. Beyond it stretched a -field but on the horizon Igor could see the town buildings.

19

Still quite a greenhorn

Sleep came slowly to Igor Chernyavin that night. His bed felt fresh and clean; he had not slept in one like it since the day he left home. It was his idea of complete bliss to sleep in a bed like this. He felt he wanted to thank somebody for it, for the cool sheets and the nice new suit and narrow black belt. But .who ought he to thank? Alexei Stepanovich? Volenko? The eighth detachment? Or, perhaps, just the Soviet power! Igor Chernyavin, however, had a very complicated conception of the Soviet power. His school-days had left some purely text-book phrases in his mind; from his life in Leningrad there remained the vague, fading sensations of childhood; while during his “free life,” the Soviet power had manifested itself as something strict, stringent and demanding, with its militiamen, its sentries, the tutors at the reception-centres and people dressed in white gowns. Polina Nikolayevna had been the most easy-going and harmless representative of the Soviet power who had crossed his path but he recalled even her sharp clever face with acute distaste now. Here in the colony he felt the Soviet power to be a puzzling and elusive complex. It was hard enough to make out even where it was. Of course, the director of the colony, Alexei Stepanovich, had something to do with it. So had that schoolmaster, Nikolai Ivanovich. But hadn’t Sancho just been telling him that before all these new buildings had been put up there was nothing at all in this place? Everything was new, Sancho said, the flower-beds, the mirrors, the parquet floors, there was nothing old in the colony, everything had been provided by the Soviet power. Another thing too; the way Sancho spoke, it looked as if the Soviet power wasn’t just Alexei Stepanovich and the schoolmaster but the colonists themselves, the whole lot of them. The way Sancho put it was, “*we* did this, *we* bought that, *we* decided to do this, *we* ordered that.” That meant, didn’t it, that Sancho Zorin himself was part of the Soviet power? Not to mention Volodya Begunok!

Yes! They’d got it all worked out very cunningly. Take that matter about the eighth detachment not wanting to have padlocks on their chests—what chic! All the same, damn it, you had to admit it was clever, for nobody would even dream of snooping into anybody else’s chest after that. Now, if Ryzhikov were here it’d be worth while seeing whether he would snoop into those chests! Of course Ryzhikov was just trash, that went without saying. Well, you had to .admit they pulled together well here. Alexei Stepanovich sat out of sight in his office and everybody seems master here. Why, even that fellow Petka with the big forehead and the cheeky-looking eyes points to the brushes and orders you to wipe your feet. They have all sorts of customs and ways of doing things, all meant to mislead people like Igor.

Igor agreed that it was fine to be lying on a spring bed with clean sheets and a counterpane; but he saw another side to the picture. That was the way a fellow could be

bribed to obedience, especially if he happened to be just longing for such pleasant things. That's probably what his dad had counted on; but matters hadn't turned out quite the way his dad had wanted them to. All right then, there was no harm in sleeping in a good bed, only let's see what it might lead to. That business about work, for instance. Nikolai Ivanovich said it was pleasant to work. But what if *he* found it wasn't? It was all very well to sit giving lessons in a schoolroom, dressed in a clean suit. But what if they put me on planning boards? No, thank you' very much, Signori!

Suppose I don't want to work. Would they kick me out? It would be interesting to find that out. What a disgrace for the First of May Labour Colony! A certain person called Igor Chernyavin, not one of your bandits, mind you, but a decent, intelligent, gentlemanly sort of fellow, could not be made to work. They just couldn't manage to make him do it! It'd be really interesting to know-how they'd expel him! Igor imagined the embarrassed looks on the faces of the eighth detachment. Oh, how sore they'd be! They hadn't managed to buy him over to their side, not with all their smart tricks, their polite manners and "customs," these clean sheets they'd given him. 'Igor Chernyavin could get along in the world without planning their boards. He remembered some of his neatest coups. They were really inspiring; there'd been such wonderful, amusing, unexpected developments! Not even the cleanest bed in all the world could compare with them because they spelt freedom!

None of these thoughts, however, prevented Igor from stretching his limbs happily and then curling himself up into a cosy position. He fell asleep without reaching a solution of the contradiction between the pleasant facts and the proud but unpleasant thoughts.

It was already light when he opened his eyes the next morning. He'd just been having a dream about interminable bugle-calls and a house on fire with masses of flames, hullabaloo and crackling noises. Igor himself seemed to be hurrying somewhere in a crowd while someone kept on saying right up against his ear: "Didn't you hear? Didn't you hear?"

That was the point at which he opened his eyes. He saw Rogov standing there, looking bright and clean.

"Didn't you hear, Chernyavin? Get up!" his voice rang. When he saw that Igor was awake he spoke more calmly, "Get up, we're starting to clean up the room."

Other colonists of the eighth detachment were fussing around the dormitory, going in and out with towels in their hands, tidying their beds and shaking pillows. Rogov buzzed round the room waving a white duster. He sprang from a chair on to the window-sill, he looked inside bedside lockers, jumped up so that he could reach the top panel of the door, ran his hand behind the radiators, dusted the pictures and then stopped and stood staring at a leg of one of the beds. Igor shut his eyes and sank back into his glorious, warm, happy dream.

"Why's that fellow still asleep?"

Igor recognized Nesterenko's voice and kept his eyes closed.

"Didn't you wake him, Rogov?" Nesterenko asked.

"I did. He's awake all right."

What would these representatives of the Soviet power do if he didn't get up, Igor reflected with interest, If he just went on lying there! Why should he be in a hurry, after all? Even according to the local "customs" he didn't have to work for the first two days. "Chernyavin!" he heard Nesterenko calling again. He didn't reply.

"Chernyavin!"

A powerful hand grasped him by the shoulder and shook him. Igor opened his eyes.

"What's up?"

"The bugle-call went a long time ago."

"What bugle-call?"

"Reveille. Didn't Sancho tell you about it yesterday?"

Igor rolled on to his back, settled down and turned his broad mischievous smile on the commander.

"He told me, but I didn't get it all."

"Well, I'm telling you now. There was a bugle-call which means get up."

"It doesn't matter, Comrade," said Igor.

He saw Nesterenko looking at him with wide-eyed amazement. Rogov stopped polishing the floor and sprang towards the bed on his bare feet. At last, Nesterenko found his tongue, but not before Igor's laughter had begun to peal out.

"What are you babbling about? 'Doesn't matter! I like that! It'll be inspection time in a moment,'" Nesterenko said.

Igor turned over on his side and placed his hand under his cheek.

"That doesn't matter either."

Sancho Zorin came dashing into the room.

"Comrade Commander," he shouted. "I've tidied the lower corridor in the 'best form.'"

But the commander was in such a dither that he missed the report.

"And will it matter if I let you have a taste of this belt?" he said to Igor in grave tones.

"It'd matter, but it'd be unlawful," Igor replied calmly.

"Oh you stuck-up little prig!"

Somehow the blanket and sheet flew off Igor. Now that he lay uncovered, he felt himself to be in a ridiculous situation and was about to get up when another bugle-call sounded outside. Rogov abandoned his brush.

"Oh, how awful!" he cried. "It's inspection time already." He rushed for his boots. All the colonists were in front of the mirror smoothing their hair. Today they were one and all in school uniform. Igor knew that the whole detachment was to work in school up to dinner-time. Then, having made themselves tidy, they all hurried to get to the free space in the middle of the dormitory, where they fell into an extended line. Nesterenko looked around helplessly. Sancho dashed up to him.

"Cover him up somehow, to hell with him! It's Klava's duty-day!" he exclaimed.

"Klava? Just think of that!"

Nesterenko tossed a blanket over Igor, who was no less horrified than he by the news about Klava. To appear before a girl wearing nothing but his underwear! He gladly grabbed the blanket and pulled it over his head, though he left himself a peep-hole,

Nesterenko made a rapid tour of the room, rubbing his fingers along the window-sill and looking under one of the beds.

“Do you know whether Alexei will be on inspection?” he asked Zorin.

“Alexei left for the city early in the morning.”

Then Rogov darted in from the corridor, whispered -the news that the inspection had begun and fell into his place in the line. The door opened. Nesterenko gave command in a loud voice.

“Detachment, shun! Sal — — — ute!”

Igor saw the line of colonists stiffen to attention, the heads turn towards the door, the arms lift in salute. Nesterenko stood apart, facing the door. In the glory of glittering gold skull-caps and sleeve-badges and broad white collars in came a short girl of fifteen or so with a boy who was a good deal younger. Behind them came bare-legged bugler Begunok, dressed in a short-sleeved canvas shirt. He at once turned eyes that burned with curiosity towards the strange figure on the bed.

Klava Kashirina, the commander on duty, had a very pretty, delicate-complexioned, plumpish face, with dark curls under her skull-cap and clear, rather small, grey eyes. She stood, very serious and erect, before the tall figure of Nesterenko and looked up at him from under her freshly-washed rosy-skinned hand, which she had raised in salute. Nesterenko took a pace forward.

“Comrade Commander on duty!” he reported. “All’s well in the eighth detachment of the First of May Labour Colony. Chernyavin failed to get up for inspection.”

There was feminine archness in the quick look Klava cast towards Igor’s prostrate form.

“Good morning, comrades!” she said in a strikingly fine voice with a high silvery tone.

“Good morning!” rang out the boys’ voices.

And with that the rank broke. There was laughter and chatter. Now the centre of attraction had suddenly become a boy wearing a Red Cross arm band, that day’s Sanitary Commission inspector. His name was Semyon Kasatkin. Remarks fell on him from all sides.

“Come and take a look here.”

“This way, please!”

“You can be sure it’s all right!”

But Kasatkin does not smile, He has captious eyes, he races all over the dormitory, peering into baskets and rubbing his fingers along the radiators. He holds a clean handkerchief in his hand and uses it as a check. Every time he brings it up to his eyes without finding any dust on it the whole detachment utters a cry of triumph. Oleg Rogov, who is detachment, monitor today, watches the prying fingers and the handkerchief in an

agony of suspense. In his excitement his hair has become disarrayed and the inspector enquires jeeringly: "Why didn't you comb your hair this morning?"

Rogov looked at Klava with an expression of alarm.

"What with so many things to attend to, you know, I—er—" he stuttered.

Abandoning hope of finding fault with the detachment, Kasatkin glanced up at the electric lamp.

"Looks as if the flies have been at that lamp," he commented.

"Nothing of the sort," the reply came in unison. "There are little spots in the glass. Every commander on duty asks the same question. It's the way the glass is made!"

While this was going on Igor Chernyavin lay pretending to be sound asleep. How the devil was he to have known that pretty little Klava would be the one on duty? He could judge by the way the voices had shifted that she was standing at his bed-side. A moment before he had been breathing as evenly as anyone in deep sleep usually does; now he stopped breathing altogether.

"Perhaps he's ill? Make sure of it later, Kasatkin," Klava said in her silvery voice.

"Very good, Comrade Commander on duty!" Kasatkin replied quietly.

But Nesterenko could not get that "it doesn't matter" out of his mind.

"I'll, did you say? Not he!" he snorted. "You should have heard how he was carrying on before the inspection. Then he suddenly went off to sleep."

Klava laid her hand on Igor's shoulder. .

"Chernyavin! Chernyavin! You ought to be ashamed of yourself!"

But not a breath escaped from Igor! He was giving himself a thorough cursing for that ridiculous character of his. He could not help the thought arising above his sense of shame that it would have been fine if, new boy as he was, he had met this girl with the most polished of salutes, and had joined all the rest in their chorus of greeting. Most likely she would have noticed his original face and the knowing smile. And now, surely she wasn't going on pulling him about? He was relieved to hear his "patron" Sancho Zorin intervening in the matter.

"Oh, chuck it, Klava!" Sancho said. "Let him stay there. He's still quite a greenhorn!"

Igor heard light footsteps moving away from his bedside. He just opened one eye, noticed a general move towards the door and shut his eye again because his glance had crossed a knowing look from Volodya Begunok's merry black eyes.

20

Injustice

Igor Chernyavin was in good spirits when he entered the dining-hall an hour later. He felt happy to be the owner of the newest uniform, the smartest belt and the most intelligent and interesting-looking face. Only his cropped head put him somewhat out of countenance. The first shift was finishing breakfast before going to school. Igor knew that Nesterenko was sore with him and expected a disagreeable conversation to ensue.

On the other hand he still felt drawn to the role of the sharp-wilted rebel. With an air of confident ease he made his way across the dining-hall, a broad well-lit room decorated with flowers. The table-cloths looked, dazzlingly white. Had they been put on clean that morning or was it just the gay effect of the morning sun? Many people had already left the hall. Igor did not notice the mocking glances turned towards him. He knew where he was supposed to sit and that he had an exclusive right to that place. He was to share a table with Nesterenko, Gontar and Sancho Zorin. Sure enough, Nesterenko and Sancho were there. They had finished eating and were busy talking. There were only scattered people finishing their breakfast at the other tables and near Klava Kashirina, at the end of the hall, Begunok was hurrying about, sure sign that there'd soon be a signal for work. Igor, however, did not have to go to work yet, hence the gaiety with which he came up to the table.

"So here's where my little place is!" he said airily.

To his surprise, Nesterenko had nothing reproachful to say in reply. Just the contrary!

"Had a good sleep?" he enquired in his good-natured manner.

"I should say so! Splendid! Didn't someone try to wake me up?"

"Yes, someone did."

"I said something, didn't I?"

"You did."

Sancho turned away towards the window. Misha Gontar had suddenly appeared and was looking at Igor crossly. Nesterenko noticed Klava coming up to their table and rose politely.

"Thanks for the breakfast, Klava. You did us proud."

Igor liked that. Sancho had told him the day before that it was the rule to thank the commander on duty for the meals.

"Don't mention," said Klava.

She glanced at her wrist watch and nodded to Volodya, who was following her around like her own shadow.

"You can give the signal in a minute."

Begunok jerked his bugle in a vague salute.

"I shall tell Alexei how you reply to an order," Nesterenko put in quietly. "He'll put some pep into you."

Volodya Begunok's face grew serious; he coloured and hurried to the door, as if he remembered he had some urgent job to do.

"You spoil the lad, Klava," Nesterenko said in a disapproving tone. "He wouldn't reply like that to my orders!"

Klava smiled. She had fine teeth and looked still prettier when she smiled.

"I didn't even notice it," she said. "I'm not used to it yet. This is only my second time on duty. Who's this here? Are you Chernyavin?"

Chernyavin bowed politely.

“Why were you shamming in the dormitory? Such a big boy and shamming like a kid!”

The colour flooded into Igor’s face. He would like to have considered Klava merely as a pretty girl. But he couldn’t! The devil only knew why, but try as he might he wasn’t able to get it out of his mind that she was the commander on-duty. Could a silk arm hand really make such a strong impression?

. “Sometimes it happens, Comrade ...” he muttered, quite at a loss.

“What do you mean, ‘it happens’? Anyway, what are you doing here in the dining-hall?”

“I’ve come here to have my breakfast—if you don’t mind.”

“Breakfast? Didn’t anybody explain to you about being late? Five minutes is the limit. They finished serving breakfast twenty minutes ago. They’re laying the tables for the second shift now. Wasn’t it explained to you?”

“Comrade Zorin did say something about it, but I overlooked it.”

“H’m, overlooked it, did you?”

Without pausing for Igor’s reply, Klava headed for the door.

This roused Igor’s ire. So she didn’t want to speak to him! Did these people think he didn’t know the Soviet laws on such matters?

Igor took a pace forward and stood face to face with Klava.

“May I ask whether this means that you are depriving me of my breakfast?”

“You are a queer fish, aren’t you? Why, you did yourself out of breakfast. Why didn’t you come down in time?”

“Does that mean I’m to get no breakfast?”

It was Nesterenko who replied.

“That doesn’t matter,” he said as if half-asleep, looking away.

Igor gripped the back of a chair and adopted the slow and weighty manner of speech he had once used with the postmaster.

“All the same it’s against the law to deprive anyone of food. I know that well enough.”

This remark put Zorin in ecstasy. He ran his fingers quickly through his hair, which was already dishevelled enough.

“Quite right, Comrade! You make a complaint about Klava!” he declared in ringing tones.

“I certainly shall! You bear that in mind, Comrade Commander on duty, I shall complain. Who do you have to complain to here?”

“To a general meeting,” Zorin went on in the same tone of voice, adding a touch of innocence.

Even Klava joined in Nesterenko’s peal of laughter. Only Zorin kept a straight face.

“Why not? He can do it. Let him. He’s got that right. . . .”

But Zorin could not keep it up either. He was now convulsed with laughter.

A bugle-call sounded in the courtyard. Klava hurried to the door.

Igor looked after her and then turned angrily on Zorin; but he too found he could not keep it up. A smile spread over his face.

21

Ruslan

Feeling very much at a loose end after his “breakfast,” Igor set out to explore the colony. He did not mind feeling hungry. During his life of freedom, he had grown used to eating at any hour, entirely according to circumstances, and even without any relation to his appetite. What really stung him was the way he’d been bossed about by that pretty girl who, far from taking any notice of his original appearance, had even thought she could teach him a lesson.

On his way out of the building he found a certain satisfaction in putting his feelings of disapproval into words. How proud they were here of their regulations, their saluting, their badges. They imagined they represented the Soviet power. Yet, really, they were nothing but bureaucrats. Igor had run up against other bureaucrats like them in his time. “Tell me, please, why has the money been sent to you at this particular place?” You can only be five minutes late for breakfast, a minute more and you stay hungry. And these are the people who are going to try and educate Igor Chernyavin! Who knows, though, whether Igor Chernyavin is willing to be turned into a bureaucrat too? And just like all bureaucrats they tell you can lodge a complaint.

So ran his thoughts as he strolled along the path through the flower-beds. The flowers did not appeal to him much. What he was really thinking was that there was nothing to prevent him leaving the flower-beds for the road and going straight along it to the town. Unfortunately he’d be at a loose end there with nothing in sight just now. What’s more, the next day was just as good a time to bolt.

Igor passed the flower-garden and turned to the right where the woods began. There was a new brick building at their edge, standing at a right angle to the one he had left and connected to it by a suspended covered-in bridge. Sancho had told him that there were to be nothing but dormitories in this building. The school would move into the old dormitories and the present school-rooms would be used for something else, Igor” had already forgotten what. General development! Carried away by delight, Sancho had reeled off some figures: 200,000; 300,000. At the same time, Sancho had been indignant about something: somebody had allocated money for the new dormitories and for taking in more children, but nobody wanted to give a kopek for production, leaving the colonists to work that out for themselves. Fellows can be enrolled but where were they going to work? Production had to be expanded. Sancho pronounced the word “production” with respect and was enthusiastic about someone called Solomon Davidovich Blum, though he made fun of him a little. On the whole, Igor decided, everything looked spick and span, but who could tell what it was really like. Before going to sleep last night the whole detachment had been chortling about something they called a stadium.

“Fancy having a stadium like that in our colony!” Nesterenko said. “It’s a shame.”

Igor walked close to the front of the new building. It was finished and the glass glittered brightly in the window-frames.

Farther on there 'Stretched a formal park with broad sanded walks lined with heavy cast-iron benches. Sancho had waxed enthusiastic when he'd described this park. Big job of work, my foot! Just a few paths and a sports-ground. They ought to see the sports-grounds they had in Leningrad! Proud of having done it all themselves! And they'd dug some sort of pool too!

A rather involved network of paths led downhill somewhere. Aha! Here's their pool. One of the paths ran along its bank and there were benches here too.

The pool was quite small, overhung here and there by trees, with wooden steps running down to the water at one place.

Igor sat down on one of the benches. Why not have a swim he asked himself. He undressed and jumped in. The water was cool, pleasant and had an unusual smell. Surely they hadn't been putting scent in it?

No, of course not, it was mint; the whole bank was overgrown with it. Igor swam out to the middle. He tried to touch the bottom but failed. The water was ice-cold down there. When he turned round, he noticed something moving near the bench where he had left his clothes. He jumped up, took another look and swam nearer the bank. A stockily-built fellow stood there looking at him with his hands in his overall pockets. He too had had his head clipped. A new boy, probably.

"Is it cold in there?" the boy shouted.

"It's fine."

"I'm coming in too."

A moment later he plopped into the water. Soon his clipped head appeared beside Igor.

"Are you a colonist?" he asked Igor.

"More or less."

"New, aren't you? I've somehow not seen you about."

"I came only yesterday."

"Oh, I see!"

"What about yourself?"

"Oh, I've been here a fortnight."

"You're new too then, aren't you?"

"That's right."

"What's it like here?"

"Well, I'm clearing out."

"Is that so?"

"Word of honour I am! To hell with them!" the newcomer said.

He rolled over in the water, pushed his backside up and kicked his legs in the air.

"It's freezing cold! I'm going to get dressed."

They swam to the bank.

"Have you got anywhere to go when you leave here?" Igor asked as he was pulling cm his trousers.

"There's my dad in the city, but he's a swine. I'll not go to him. I pinched a miserable five hundred roubles worth of bonds from him and he made the hell of a row and hauls me off to the militia. Imagine someone who's got a responsible job doing a thing like that. He works in some grain-supply place. The militia sent me here."

"Have you started working here yet?"

"Uh-huh! They've managed to make me do that all right! Building socialism, that's what they say they're doing. Well, let them get on with it!"

"Why aren't you working today?"

"That's part of their socialism for "you! There's no material. I'm working on a dovetailing machine. The lathe's a beauty, I must say; but there's no material. To hell with them!"

"What's your name?"

"Gorokhov. That's my surname. Nothing wrong with that, but as for the rest of it—well—it's Ruslan! My folk must have been crazy when they called me that!"

Igor laughed. Gorokhov joined in with a smirk. He had a very plain, pimply face with a big nose which was much redder than the rest of his face. When he laughed he showed teeth all different in size and colour and growing in different directions.

"Ruslan!" he snorted. "It was all right until I read *Ruslan and Lyudmila*. I could stand it till then. But after I'd read that poem.... Have you read it?"

"Yes," said Igor.

"Ruslan indeed. With a mug like mine? I ask you! My folk can get away all right with doing a thing like that to me, 'but just let me touch their filthy five hundred roubles and off they go for the militia!"

"I'll probably bolt too," said Igor.

"You got parents?"

"Mine live a long way off. In Leningrad."

"Thinking of going there?"

"No, I won't do that."

"Where'll you go then?"

"Well, what about you?"

They sat down on the bench, looked in each other's eyes and grinned sheepishly.

"Damn them!" Ruslan said pensively. "Perhaps they're right, after all. . ."

"Who are you talking about?"

"This lot here. What riles me though is the way they do things, everything according to rules. Rules, rules, rules! Then I don't like the way they drag you about in every

direction. They nag and nag at you to join the shooting circle, or the drama circle, or the painting circle. 'Everybody ought to study.' And I want to play in the band but they've got some rule about that too."

"Didn't you say you'd run away?"

"So I will. D'you imagine I'll put up with it? I wanted to play in the band. 'Wait a little,' they said, because they only take colonists in the band."

"Well, you're a colonist, aren't you?"

"The hell I am! Haven't they told you about that? The hell I am!"

"I 'did hear something about the—er—title of colonist."

"That's it! Title of colonist. You're not a colonist, you're only a probationer. Oh, they'll make you a uniform all right, but without that thingumajig on your sleeve . . . the ensign is what they call it. And of course they'll punish you to their hearts' content; give you special tasks, cancel your leave and dock your pocket-money. That Alexei does just whatever he likes. They'll switch you from one detachment to the other and put you on heavy work... . Arid they won't let you play in the band either."

"What a hell of a mess!" said Igor, taken aback. "And how long does that go on for?"

"Oh, never less than four months. Then it's up to the detachment. They lay the question before a general meeting. It's decided by a majority vote. But you know how it is at those meetings; it's the Komsomol members who fix things. They get together somewhere and talk secretly and you never hear what about."

"But why do they only take colonists into the band?"

"Why? God knows why. What's more, if you're a colonist you can get into the band all right but you can't get out of it again, hell no!"

"You can't?"

"No! You've got to stay a musician till the end of your life. Rules, you see! Let's say I've had enough of it. Oh no, you've got to go on playing! Anyhow I'm clearing out."

Ruslan turned a resentful "face towards the depths of the park and became lost in thought. Igor was thinking things over too. From beyond the park came the sounds of the machine-shop. With them came other sounds— children's cries and the barking of dogs. Then a bell clanged, once, twice, then rhythmically on. Ruslan craned his neck forward, suddenly on the alert.

"What detachment do you belong to?" asked Igor.

"Eh?" Ruslan asked, not catching [he question,

"What detachment are you in? Are you in the first, Volenko's?"

"Yes, I'm in Volenko's. It sounds as if the timber's come. They said they'd bring it."

"Is Volenko all right as a commander?"

"They're all the same here. I'm off. They've brought the timber."

Ruslan plunged through the shrubs to the near-by path. Igor followed him with his eyes. Ruslan was already far away. He saw his blue singlet flashing from tree to tree.

The Blum Stadium

Igor also went towards the “production yard,” as it was called in the colony. Sancho had already told him that there were several workshops attached to the colony. A new production chief had arrived recently and now instead of work-rooms there were to be real shops: a mechanical-shop, a foundry, a machine-shop, an assembly-shop and a dressmaking-shop. Igor had never in his life seen anything being manufactured and was not interested in such matters, so none of these terms meant anything to him; he merely assumed that something was sewn together in the sewing-shop. But now it looked as if he would be made to work in one of these shops. He decided to find out what sort of place this “production yard” was.

Tracing Ruslan’s paces through the park Igor found himself in what really looked like a new yard, obviously cleared quite recently in the woods. There were still a few tree-stumps showing here and there, while elsewhere the powerful roots of dislodged trees lay in deep craters. The clearing was a vast place and contained so many things that it was difficult to sort them all out. Here lay stacks of planks, beams and joists mixed up haphazardly with lumps of coal, all kinds of iron ware, heaps of sawdust, wood-shavings, empty barrels, all smothered under builder’s lime. Around the yard stood several low-walled wooden buildings, looking like simple sheds but with chimney-stacks in their roofs. Smoke was coming out of these chimneys in various shades of thickness and colour, *so* they couldn’t be just sheds. In one of these buildings, which looked more solid, something was being done to pieces of timber and the timber was obviously not liking it, for it was uttering groans and wails of every tone and pitch: quiet, low, echoing sounds of futile protest; shrill, nervy, irritated sounds, and now and again a real wail that broke through in heart-rending, unbearable desperation. Near this building stood several long carts from which the workers were throwing down planks.

Igor, who had paused on coming out of the park so as to choose the easiest way of crossing this yard, saw a group of people standing near-by; it consisted of Alexei Stepanovich Zakharov, who was bare-headed and wore high boots and a khaki tunic of military cut, Vitya Torsky, Klava Kashirina and two others. One of these was a heavily-built man with a pot-belly and a round head which might have been shaven or might simply have been bald. Igor took him to be the celebrated production chief Solomon Davidovich Blum. He was pointing triumphantly to a long, barrack-like building, which, though newly erected, had a repulsive appearance. It was difficult to tell what it was made of—scraps of laths, boards, old sheets of plywood or dried clay. The roofing material, too, was a strange mixture of sheet-iron, plywood and waterproof ‘fabric with even a few rows of tiles in one place. The great length of the place made it look conspicuously clumsy. It ran rather steeply downhill to the pool and its sloping, splayed construction was in open defiance of all the accepted laws of architecture.

With an expression on his face that showed he had been taken aback by the sudden appearance of this monster, Zakharov stood at the edge of the park.

“Y—e—s! I imagined it was something like this, but, all the same...” he said •through his laughter. His hands went on moving in the pockets of his riding-breeches.

Torsky was doubled up with laughter.

“That’s Solomon Davidovich for you! All put up in a week!” he exploded.

Klava’s face wore a reserved smile.

“That’s what’s known as the Blum stadium,” said Torsky.

Old Blum protruded his full lips.

“What are you talking about? The Blum stadium, indeed!” he expostulated. “Is it a bad assembly-shop? Tell me; is there anything wrong with it?”

“Come here, Chernyavin,” said Zakharov, who had caught sight of Igor.

Igor sprang to attention and raised his arm in what he felt sure was an impressive salute. He noticed that Klava Kashirina was looking at him with curiosity.

“Good morning, Comrade Director!”

“Good morning! Come here. Now, you’re from Leningrad and you’ve seen all kinds of palaces. How do you like the assembly-shop?”

“Do you mean that shed over there?”

“It’s a stadium,” Torsky said.

“Call it a shed or a stadium, but you can work in it,” Solomon Davidovich said calmly.

“Wouldn’t it tumble down?” asked Igor.

Blum reacted as if Igor was an old friend of his whose opinion had to be given careful consideration.

“Did you hear what he said? Tumble down, indeed! Will it tumble down or not, Volonchuk?”

Instructor Volonchuk, who was Blum’s right-hand man, remained imperturbable. He was a dour, clumsy fellow, a mass of muscle.

“Sooner or later it’s bound to tumble down but you can’t say it will do so right away,” he replied, weighing up the stadium’s chances of survival with admirable objectivity.

“Do you think it’ll tumble down within a year?”

“A year?” Volonchuk echoed, looking closely at the building. “No, it ought to last a year. It’ll be another matter, of course, if we have heavy rains.”

“Who’s asking you for your opinion about the weather?” Blum shouted at him. “In the days of Noah the whole world tumbled down when it rained heavily. When a ‘man’s building something he can’t have the Flood in mind, he counts on normal weather conditions.”

Volonchuk listened calmly to Blum’s angry outburst.

“If the weather’s good it’ll be all right. It’ll hold,” he added, without blinking an eyelid.

Zakharov adjusted his pince-nez and gazed round the yard with a peculiar expression that was fraught with eternal patience.

“Very well,” he said, walking ahead; “let’s have a look inside.”

“Inside!” exclaimed the delighted Blum. “Of course we’ll go inside. It’s meant for working in, you know, not for the contemplation of beauty. Beauty costs money too, dear

comrades. If you're broke you shave once a week. And you're none the worse for that, by the way."

Through a creaking door, knocked together somehow out of pieces of scrap, they passed into the assembly-shop. Nothing had been installed in there *as yet* and all eyes were drawn to the floor, whose surface bore a remote resemblance to parquetry, being composed of countless bits of wood of various length, breadth and thickness. Torsky was the first to express his delight at the construction of the inside of the building.

"If you ever drop some tool or machine part here it'll go rolling; all the way down so that we'll never be able to catch it!" he said with considerable restraint.

Everybody joined in the laughter except Blum.

"Why should it go rolling down?" he retorted. "It's empty now, of course, but when we get people in here, with work-benches and the planks, why should it go rolling down? Do you hear me, Volonchuk? Do you think it'll go rolling down?"

Volonchuk took a searching look at everything.

"It oughtn't to," he said at length. "It'll be bound to catch on to something."

"I'll take that back then," said Vitya seriously. "If it's going to catch on to something that's an altogether different matter."

Blum's ire was now thoroughly aroused. He struck his haunches several times with his short arms. His face swelled up in an expression of readiness for combat.

"Did you want a place to make furniture in or a billiard-hall?" he demanded. "Did you want everything to be so steady that it wouldn't move unless you put a billiard-rod to it? What's the good of all this talk? Are we serious or are we just fooling around? Maybe you'd like to have a stone-built shop! Well, show me your money! What have you got to show? Bricks? Iron-sheeting? Capital? Your fitters are working under the open sky and I've put a roof over their heads, but you're not satisfied, it's an architectural facade, a propylaeum you've got to have. Along you came with your inspection committee and called it a stadium! But what did you give me, I ask you? Estimates, plans, blueprints? Where's your money? I haven't had a single engineer! Just what have you done for me, Comrade

Secretary of the Commanders Council, you, Victor Torsky?"

The Secretary of the Commanders' Council Victor Torsky did not find anything to say. Zakharov took Blum by the elbow in a conciliatory way.

"Don't be angry, Solomon Davidovich," he said. "We didn't expect anything better. Just you see, next year we'll build a real factory and then we'll burn this building down with all our gratitude. We'll put straw under it and puff. ..."

"I like that! So you'll burn it down! Why, this will make a first-rate storehouse!"

"All right, then. Have it your own way."

"Thank you! Now you have a place to work in. What would you have done if we hadn't built this Blum stadium, Comrade Torsky?"

"I always maintained that we ought to have built the factory before the dormitories," Torsky said.

“There you are! You did the talking while I got on with the building.”

“I said we ought to build a factory, but you’ve put up a stadium.”

“Comrade Torsky, a dog in hand is much better than a lion in the bush.”

Zakharov laughed, took Blum affectionately by the arm again and made for the door.

Igor Chernyavin waited until they had all left. He looked round the empty building. He felt sorry for someone. By the time he had reached the door he realized who it was. He felt sorry for Solomon Davidovich Blum.

23

A Rather Interesting Notion

“You’ve to begin working in the assembly-shop tomorrow,” Nesterenko told Igor that evening.

“I’ve never worked in a place like that before.”

“Well, you will tomorrow.”

“That’s in the stadium, isn’t it?”

“You’ll be in there later on. You’ll start in the yard.”

“What’ll I have to do there?” asked Igor.

“The foreman will show you.”

“But what if I’m not planning to be an assembly-worker?”

“I’m not planning to be a foundry man myself, but I’m working in the foundry all the same,” Nesterenko retorted.

“That’s your own affair, but I’ve got different ideas.”

“So you have ideas, do you? You’ve learned to have them, have you? Do you hear that, Sancho? He has the idea that he’s not going to be an assembly-worker, so he doesn’t want to work. You’re responsible for him; if he doesn’t understand explain it to him.”

Sancho agreed gladly to do the explaining and waved Igor to a seat beside him on a bench.

“Of course I will. Sit down, I’ll make it all clear to-you.”

Igor sat down, smiling sourly in expectation of his lesson. He remembered the pitiful stadium, Solomon Davidovich’s pathetic poverty; and everything became tedious and dull. What was the need for all this?

“Why are you moping like this, Chernyavin?”

Sancho began. “That’s bad, you know. Don’t think I don’t know the reason! You’re looking at things¹ this way, aren’t you? ‘Why have all these colonists got such a down on me? After all, I’m Chernyavin, and that’s something! I’ll spend three or four days with them and then I’ll be off to the ends of the earth. That’s what you’re thinking, isn’t it? I’m right, eh?’ Igor kept quiet. “As a matter of fact, you’ll probably stay here with us for four years.”

“Well, what if I do?” asked Igor.

“What do you mean, ‘what if I do’? If you’ve got any sense.... Just imagine, four years! All right, today you don’t want to work in the assembly-shop, tomorrow you’ll refuse to work in the foundry. Then you’ll say you “don’t want to be a turner. ‘I want to be a doctor,’ you’ll say, ‘send me to a hospital so I can cure people!’ That means we’ll have you bothering us for four whole years! You’ll go on brooding and we’ll just go on and on fussing over you! That’s how you see it, isn’t it?” The picture Zorin drew interested Igor but above all he was interested in the flat contradiction between it and his own clear logic which he could put into quite simple words; here sat Sancho beside him with his eyes sparkling, but, after all, wasn’t Sancho rather dull-witted?

“You’re wrong, Comrade Zorin.” “All right, say I’m wrong. You tell me what’s right, then.”

“What you’re saying is this: Chernyavin wants to be a doctor. Well, I ask you, what’s wrong with that? Lots of people want to be doctors, don’t they? But you dear comrades here think like this: ‘Whether you like it or not you’re to go into the assembly-shop.’ And I’m supposed to reply: ‘Very good, Comrade Commander, I’ll go into the assembly-shop.’ But I don’t want to do that.”

“But who’s forcing you to, Chernyavin? Are we? Of course we’re not! Just look here!” Zorin pointed to the window: “We don’t have any fences or guards, there’s nobody to keep you back or use threats against you. Why don’t you just go?”

“I’ve nowhere to go....”

“What do you mean nowhere to go? Didn’t you just say you didn’t want to be an assembly-worker? Didn’t you say you wanted to be a doctor?”

“Well, where ought I to go then?”

“Where you’d be a doctor. Go away and study or whatever’s needed for that. Just you go and try.”

“You mean you can’t learn that here?”

“You can learn it here all right, but it’s got to be our way.”

“That means starting in the assembly-shop?”

“What if you do start that way? Do you think it’s so bad in the assembly-shop?”

“No, it’s not that, but you haven’t explained anything to me. What’s the sense of it?”

“The sense of it is that we need it. You’ve lived here two days, haven’t you? You’ve been fed, haven’t you? We’ve given you clothes and a bed. And there you were in the dining-hall today already shouting: ‘You’ve no right to do this!’ And why haven’t we the right? You think it’s no business of yours where all we’ve given you comes from! ‘I’m Igor Chernyavin, give me everything. I want to be a doctor!’ But what if you’re lying? How can we tell? We’ve also got something to say! We can say: ‘Clear out, Chernyavin! Go to the devil, Doctor Chernyavin!’”

““You wouldn’t say that though.”

“So you think we wouldn’t! You don’t know us yet! You think it’ll be a case of you saying: ‘I’m off!’ But, in fact, we’ll kick you out before that happens. What use are you to us? We didn’t ask a word about who you are or where you come from. Who knows whether you’ll stay? We accepted you as a comrade, clothed you, fed you gave you a

place to sleep. You're on your own while we are a colony. You come swaggering up to us with your talk about wanting to be a doctor, yet you wouldn't trust us with a kopek. You want us to lay all our cards on the table for you right away. Why don't you put a bit of confidence in us? Why won't you trust us?"

"Trust whom?" Igor asked thoughtfully, with the feeling that Sancho was not so naive after all.

"Why, all of us!" Sancho said.

"Trust you?"

"Uh-huh, trust us. Look here, our fellows live and work and study and do things. Doesn't it occur to you that they must have some notion what they're doing? While you don't see anything except your own interests—Dr. Chernyavin! And what is there to that doctor idea, anyway? We know we are a labour colony, that's something clear to us all. But who can see you're going to make a doctor?"

They were still seated in the dusk on a dormitory bench; outside in the courtyard the lamps were being turned on. The boys had gone off somewhere. Only occasionally steps were heard in the corridor. "Sevka! Sevka!" someone was calling.

It grew very quiet. Of course, Igor had not been convinced by Sancho's words but he no longer felt like arguing with him, while a simple and easily attainable desire had arisen in him: why not try? He felt ready to put a certain amount of trust in these people.

"Oh, I was only talking generally," he said to Zorin. "You don't think I'm really such a bureaucrat as all that do you? Where do you work?"

"In the assembly-shop."

"Is it interesting work there?"

"No, it's not."

"Well, there you are."

"Do you think you ought to be put only on interesting jobs? With music while you work, eh? And what if there happens to be something uninteresting to be done, I suppose you couldn't do that?"

"Something uninteresting to be done!" Igor said, looking in Zorin's eyes which glittered challengingly. "Uninteresting to be done! That's a rather interesting notion, sir."

24

The Girl in the Dark

Igor required nobody's help to get up when reveille was sounded on his second morning in the colony. It gave him a pleasant feeling to jump quickly and lightly out of his bed, but when he came to making it, the task seemed to be quite beyond his powers. He kept an eye on the other beds and did exactly what everybody else was doing, but it came out worse. The top turned out lumpy, the fold down the middle ran crookedly, the blanket would not fit the length of the bed. Sancho watched him and then took the bed clothes apart.

"Just watch me," he told Igor.

Sancho went about the work neatly and Igor grasped the main points of his technique: Sancho started by folding the blanket in two, then laying it down on the bed and after that spreading it out, thus obtaining a fold as straight as an arrow.

“Thanks,” said Igor, who was pleased with the method.

“Don’t mention it,” said Sancho.

Igor felt in high spirits that morning. He took his place with the others to salute when the commander on duty came into the dormitory. It was the commander of the fourth detachment, Alyosha Zyriansky, famous throughout the colony where he was more often known as “Robespierre.” The detachment monitors dashed around like cats on hot bricks and ten minutes before the inspection time Nesterenko himself took and hurriedly polished the glass on Voroshilov.

“You’ve forgotten who’s on duty today, haven’t you?” he reproached Khariton Savchenko, the dormitory monitor.

The anxious Khariton looked hastily into the lockers and under the mattresses.

“What about finger-nails?” Nesterenko asked when they were all standing in line. “Has everyone trimmed his nails?”

“Where the hell are the scissors?” one of the boys bawled, after glancing at his hands.

“If you’re only going to start looking for them when the bugle’s blowing for inspection you’ll never find them,” fumed Nesterenko. “What are yours like, Chernyavin?”

“They seem all right!”

“Seem isn’t good enough. Gontar, hand him the scissors. Hey! Look out where you’re cutting your nails. Oh! Look what you’ve done, Misha!”

But the inspection team was already inside the dormitory and Nesterenko called the line to attention. Zyriansky was about sixteen years old, of middle height, and well-built. The striking feature about him was his grey eyes which were piercing and intelligent but not lacking in cheerfulness. His eyebrows were short and straight, growing thicker near the bridge of his nose.

While he was still engaged in greeting the detachment, Zyriansky had noticed everything, though one wouldn’t know that from his manner. He looked Nesterenko merrily in the eyes as he received his report. He did not roam round the dormitory or peer into anything, but, before leaving, turned to his companion on duty, a quiet modest girl on the Sanitary Commission.

“Make a note in the report that the detachment dormitory is dirty,” he told her.

“What do you mean, ‘dirty,’ Alyosha?” demanded Nesterenko.

“What do you call this, then? First you polish the floor, and then you drop nail-parings on it! Wouldn’t you call that dirt?”

“Nesterenko was silent.

. “You know very well, Vasya, that it’s no good smartening yourselves up just for the commander on duty,” Zyriansky said at the door. “And, by the way, your new boy hasn’t cut his nails. His hand looked like a wolf’s paw when he saluted.”

Nesterenko was very cut up after the inspection.

“Damn it! Filthy devils!” he kept on saying. “All your fault too, Misha. How can a fellow who’s in love have such nails? How could you do such a thing? On the floor! It’ll be all very well if Zakharov passes the report, but what if he puts it on the agenda for the general meeting?”

Misha Gontar said nothing to that. He squatted down and picked up his nail-parings from the floor.

“If that happens, I shall tell the meeting straight out: it’s all the fault of our Misha Gontar, a man who’s fallen in love. Word of honour, I’ll say that. And if there’s one more case of filthiness like this, I’ll ask Zakharov to put you under arrest for three hours. What’s more, I’ll tell Oksana the whole story, so she’ll know.”

And still Gontar said nothing to the commander. It was quite enough for him to be put in such a position in front of his mates. Nesterenko left him in peace and turned towards Igor.

“Are you going to start working in the assembly-shop or are you going on cooling your heels?” he enquired in a weary, discontented voice.

Igor was glad to be able to offer the commander some consolation, if only on this score.

“All right, I’ll go,” he said.

Igor was expected to start work in the shop after dinner, on the second shift. That suited him; it meant putting off for a while his introduction to his working life. After breakfast he decided to go to the park for a stroll and a swim. But no sooner had he set foot on the first path there than he met a “lovely apparition” of a girl.

During his “free life,” Igor had already made some efforts to be popular with the girls and had taken various steps with that aim, such as combing his hair, wearing buttonholes and making smart remarks. But he had never come across a girl to interest him particularly. In the manner of gentlemen, he paid the tribute that charm and beauty demanded and even considered himself to be something of a dab at this but he always forgot about the little beauties once they were out of sight. For that reason, whenever he met a new girl, he felt as unattached in his curiosity as any Don Juan.

In that spirit he approached the girl in the park, a girl who, he readily admitted, was “lovely.” This, by the way, was a word Igor set great store by because of its expressive quality, though he managed to make himself forget that he had acquired it from his father, who was always talking about “a lovely man!”, “a lovely woman!” or “a lovely idea!”

So to Igor the girl coming along the path in the park was “lovely.” Her beauty was the more striking because she was very shabbily and unattractively dressed. It was quite clear that she was not a member of the colony, for the colonists were always spick and span. Her face was of olive complexion with a very unusual, deep-pink colouring that spread clearly and smoothly over her cheeks without the slightest variation in tone. Such pure if aces, without shine, scratch or pimple, are rarely found. Her large brown eyes, the whites of which seemed to have a tinge of blue, looked intently and a little confusedly from under her thin dark eyebrows. Her hair, drawn into a plait, was dark, with a noticeably-

chestnut gloss. It curled freely at her temples. In a word, she was really lovely. Igor came to a dead stop.

“Where did you get such lovely eyes, dear lady?” he asked in astonishment.

The girl halted, moved to the edge of the path and raised a hand to her face.

“What’s the matter with my eyes?” she asked.

“You’ve got remarkable eyes!”

There was anger in those eyes now. Then the girl dropped her gaze and averted her blushing face. She hurried off the path on to the grass.

“I assure you I don’t bite, dear lady.”

Again she stopped and cast a stern, suspicious glance at him.

“Mind your own business. Be on your way!”

“But I haven’t got any special way to go. Tell me your name.”

The girl moved restlessly from one of her bare feet to the other and smiled.

“Are you from the colony?”

“Yes.”

“You’re a funny one!”

She spoke these mocking words with real animation, stole another look at Igor, stepped swiftly aside over the grass, and made off without turning round to look at him again.

25

The Chair-Struts

The broad sturdy rosy-cheeked foreman, Shtevel by name, gazed at Igor with eyes that were full of surprise.

“You’ve never worked, you say?” he echoed.

“Never,” said Igor.

“A beginner, eh?”

“Yes, I’m a beginner.”

“Didn’t you ever sweep the floor at home?”

“No, never.”

“Well, you can’t be said to have had much experience, can you? Never mind, though ... let’s start. To begin with, I’ll put you on to rubbing down chair-struts. That’s light work.”

“Chair-struts! What are they?”

The foreman touched a finished chair with his foot.

“There’s the strut, do you see? They’ve fixed it on without rubbing it down smooth. They’ve left the hangnails, so to speak, and that looks bad. Now, you file them clean and

the chairs'll look better. They've rubbed everything else down clean, but when it came to the struts they thought they didn't matter and could be left rough."

Though free with his words, the foreman was a practical man. While he had been talking, his hands had been busy, and on the bench before Igor there had appeared a pile of struts, a rasp, and some sheets of sand-paper. When he had finished what he had to say, Shtevel ran the rasp up and down one of the struts, sand-papered it, and gave it a look of approval as he felt it with the palm of his hand.

"You see how it's turned out! Quite a nice feel about it. Now get on with it!"

While all this was being said and done, Igor looked at the foreman, the struts, and the various appliances with amused interest. Then, when Shtevel left him with a friendly pat on the shoulder, Igor picked up a strut and started to file it. The awkward nature of the work revealed itself right away, for the strut rolled out off his hand on its own accord, and the hard fiery edge of the rasp bit into his fingers. Two of them were scratched and started to bleed. Near him he heard a familiar voice say cheerfully: "A good start, Comrade."

Igor turned round. Of course, he knew the voice. It was Seredin, whom Nesterenko had called a fop. He belonged to the eighth detachment, though from the other dormitory. He had clean-cut features and held his head tilted back a little. He was holding several thin panels for chair-backs in his hand and was polishing them with loving care as he wielded a piece of sand-paper fixed to a ruler. Before Igor had a chance to take a good look at them, off they flew to a pile of finished parts and Seredin's hand had grabbed some more.

"Get some iodine from the cupboard," Seredin nodded with a smile. "It's nothing to worry about. Everybody starts that way."

Igor went to the cupboard and found some lint and a "big bottle of iodine. He doused the scratches and asked Seredin to bandage his fingers.

"What on earth do you want to do that for?" asked Seredin. "Lint, huh? Perhaps you'd like to send for a doctor?"

"But they're bleeding."

"You'll not bleed to death! You've put some iodine on it, and that's enough. Why, it's hardly bleeding at all, only a drop."

Igor did not argue the point and put the lint back into the cupboard. But his fingers were smarting and he felt nervous about picking up another strut. All the same, he did so, held it in his hand and tried the rasp on it. Suddenly he threw everything down angrily, turned his back on the bench, and began to gaze round the shop.

There wasn't any work-shop, really. Just some sheets of damaged plywood knocked together somehow and propped up against a wall that danced in time to the near-by machines. This shed was the formal justification for calling the place an assembly-shop. In fact, there was room under its roof for only four of its complement of twenty boys, the rest being under the open sky, from which they were provided very slight protection by the red-hued crests of some tall poplars that grew along the edge of the yard. Standing close together in the open air there were a number of benches of various heights and sizes, made, apparently, from roughly hewn scraps of wood. Several boys worked straight

on the ground. From time to time a tall labourer from the machine-shop arrived with bundles of loose parts. The colony carpentry shop produced nothing but oak theatre chairs. The machine-shop's job was to make chair-backs, seats, legs, and struts. The theatre chairs were joined together in threes, but before the sets were made up, various units such as trestles, seats, and so on, had to be assembled. This and the final assembling into complete sets was entrusted to the more qualified boys, among whom was Sancho Zorin. They worked with a will, their mallets rising and falling as piles of assembled units grew steadily beside them, while near Zorin were to be seen the finished three-seater frames, already standing on their legs, though still lacking seats. Most of the boys, however, were occupied with jobs like the one that had been entrusted to Igor. The rasps darted to and fro in their hands, murmuring, hissing, tinkling.

Igor went on gazing round the shop until Seredin asked him: "Why aren't you working? Don't like it?"

Igor turned back to his bench in silence and picked up the rasp. It felt very unpleasant in his hand, heavy, rough, with bits of sawdust sticking to it, and it was hard to hold on to. Igor laid it aside and picked up a strut. That felt nicer. He studied it intently. His eyes took in all its blemishes, the unevenness of the surface, the sharp edges which should have been cut smooth, the ragged ends left by the machine-cutter. He stretched his free hand once more for the rasp, but at that moment a bee flew in. Now what on earth could have brought a bee into the assembly-shop? Igor watched it with the thought that it would realize the pointlessness of its visit and fly away. The bee, however, did not fly away and went on dipping over the bench, bumping against the freshly cut slivers of oak. Then, tempted by the drops of drying blood, it suddenly alighted on Igor's wounded hand. Igor turned cold with fear, waved his strut and, to his relief, saw the bee fly away. Drawing a long breath, he turned round, and only then noticed that he felt hot, that the sun was beating down on his head and that his neck was in a sweat. Suddenly something heavy and hairy landed on that hot sticky neck. Igor waved his free hand and an enormous greenish fly buzzed rudely right in his face. He looked up and saw two of them. They had the cheek to show him their angry phizs! Igor grew angry too.

"To hell with it all!" he exploded, very near to tears. "Flies!"

Zorin and Seredin and a few others laughed. Seredin chuckled good-naturedly with his head thrown back but

Zorin's laughter was loud and could be heard all over the yard.

"They're nothing, Igor," he shouted, "they don't bite."

"Perhaps they think you're a horse!" one of the youngsters chipped in.

"To hell with it!" exclaimed Igor, throwing his strut on the bench.

"You don't want to work?" Seredin asked.

"No, I don't!"

Zorin laid his work aside and came towards him.

"What's up, Chernyavin?"

Igor turned on Zorin a face full of rage.

“Go to hell!” he bawled. “What’s the point of your struts and your rasps? What’s it got to do with me? Call this a workshop! With flies in it the size of dogs!”

Out of the corner of his eye he noticed that Seredin was shaking his head disapprovingly as he went on working and that others were looking at him seriously, with surprise written on their faces.

“All right!” said Sancho. “We shan’t press you to stay. Suit yourself, this way out, please.”

“I’ll go all right.”

Without looking at anybody, Igor stepped over the piles of chair parts. Sancho had something else to say but Igor didn’t catch it. He didn’t hear because before his eyes there swam an unexpected vision, none other than the girl he’d met in the park that morning. She was bending over a basket of shavings, looking at him with a pert expression of unconcealed derision.

26

Hero of the Day

For Igor the rest of that day was stifling, aimless and, above all, lonely. In the dining-hall, at supper time, Gontar, who had not witnessed the incident, gave a savoury account of it to the accompaniment of homeric laughter.

“Imagine ‘flies like dogs.’”

“Scandalous!” a boyish voice rang out from the next table; and went on with a business-like inflection: “Flies like that ought to be kept on chains,” Igor sat facing the window. He was fuming. “So you don’t mean to work!” Nesterenko remarked.

“No,” I don’t.”

“But you’ll go on living in the colony!” “I didn’t ask to come here. I was sent.” “That’s a good one!” Zorin interjected, seriously. Everybody stopped laughing. Igor noticed several people looking at him with interest or, perhaps, even with respect. He felt proud of himself, rose to his feet and spoke to Zorin in a voice loud enough for the others to hear.

“You see,” he said, “I don’t feel that cleaning your struts is what I’m cut out for.”

And with that he left the dining-hall.

He was feeling quite pleased with himself. His face had recovered its usual self-assured look, its tendency to break into a knowing smile, while his eyes screwed themselves up on their own accord. Before the signal “Bedtime” was given he went for a stroll in the park and watched a game of volley-ball. Among the other spectators he noticed a group of girls, including one with a round freckled very pleasant face, standing next to Klava Kashirina. She looked his way, smiled, then whispered something to her companion. She had if laming red curls. Igor moved over towards her.

“You’re Chernyavin, aren’t you?” she asked him. “Do you know how to play volley-ball?” “Yes, I can play it.” “And not afraid of the flies?”

The girls all burst out laughing. Only Klava looked at him with disapproval, which she expressed by tightening her beautiful lips. But Igor did not take offence.

"Flies bother me only in your assembly-shop. They interfere with the important work that's being done-there. That's a place for cleaning struts and flies have no business there."

"How many struts have you cleaned?" The girls were quiet now, but it was clear they were only waiting to hear Igor's answer to laugh even more loudly and merrily. He did not feel like amusing them.

"I refused to do that ridiculous job," he said. "They'll find plenty without me who are willing to clean those stupid struts."

"So what are you going to do?" The red-headed girl smiled calmly as she spoke in a pleasant deep voice which contained no trace of derision. The laughter had died down. Igor was pleased with his success. He tried to answer the question with dignity.

"I shall go on looking round. They'll find a role for me."

This created the desired impression. The girls gazed at him with respect. But Klava turned away.

"You've already found your role—a buffoon's," she blurted.

At this point the girls burst into such laughter that tears came to their eyes. Igor left them and turned his attention to the volley-ball game. On the whole, these exchanges had not particularly distressed him. Of course, that Klava Kashirina was their commander and, of course, they would laugh when she allowed herself to call him a buffoon. But the other girl, the red-head, she hadn't laughed so much. Who could she be?

"Who's the red-head?" he asked Rogov as he ran past.

"Oh! That's Lida! Lida Talikova, commander of the eleventh!"

Aha! She was a commander, too, and yet she hadn't laughed much.

When all the boys had gathered in the dormitory, Igor was pleasantly surprised to find that nobody reminded him of the shop incident. Everybody behaved as if nothing out of the ordinary had happened in the detachment and busied himself with his own affairs, some writing, others reading. Zorin and Misha Gontar were playing chess on one of the benches. Nesterenko spread some newspapers on the floor and began to dismantle a strange piece of apparatus, all springs and wheels. Igor walked up and down the room on his own, too shy to ask what the gadget was. There was a short bugle-call out in the yard. Nesterenko raised his head in surprise.

"Reporting time already? Oh, how time flies! You go and report, Alexander. Look what a state my hands are in..."

He held up his grimy fingers. Alexander Ostapchin, the commander's deputy turned from the mirror and swept his fine eyes the length of the room.

"He's a sly devil, our commander is! So you mean I've got to talk to Alexei about Misha's finger-nails!"

There were smiles all round.

“Well, talking won’t hurt you!” Nesterenko said gloomily. “Tell him our dandy was in a hurry. You’re fond of talking, after all. Sort of practice for being a procurator. And if Gontar gets it hot, well . . . that doesn’t matter.”

He cast a withering look at Gontar, who groaned and expressed his vexation by claspings his brow.

Ostapchin looked himself over once more in the glass and dashed out of the dormitory.

“What’s that thing you’ve got there, Comrade Nesterenko?” asked Igor.

Nesterenko raised his head, looked at Igor with disapproval and waved a hand in a gesture which could have no other meaning except: Leave me alone!

Igor went over to the chess-players. Gontar’s hand was still at his brow. He took no notice of Igor, but as he moved a chess-man, spoke in low tones to Zorin.

“Do you think Alexei will send for me?”

“What for?”

“Because of Zyriansky’s report, of course!”

“Oh, that!” said Zorin, playing his knight. “I don’t think so. Alexei doesn’t send for people for trifles like that.”

“But what if he does?”

“He won’t. He’ll mention it to Ostapchin though. If anybody’s going to be sent for it’ll be this slacker.”

Zorin nodded towards Igor. Gontar removed his hand from his ‘brow and shoved Igor back a little with it.

“Move away, you’re standing in the light.”

Zorin’s last remark had aroused Igor’s interest.

“Send for me? Any time lie likes! I’m already in a flap, Signori!”

Igor looked around at them all with an air of triumph, but nobody paid the slightest attention to him.

Five minutes later, Ostapchin returned to the dormitory seething with emotion, crimson-faced, and obviously upset.

“One hour’s detention,” he shouted, goggling at them all.

Gontar jerked his thumb in his own direction.

“Who, me?”

“No, me!” replied Ostapchin, making exactly the same gesture.

“You!” All jumped to their feet and looked at each other in astonishment. Even Khariton Savchenko managed to react with a quick movement of some sort.

“You! Oh!” Nesterenko rolled over on his back from his seat on the floor, kicked his legs in the air and burst into loud peals of laughter. Gontar’s hand was back on his brow as he smiled sheepishly. Zorin was the most delighted of them all. He jumped up, waved his arms and gripped Ostapchin by the hand.

“Because of the nails?” he asked.

“Of course! That wretched ‘Robespierre’ wasn’t satisfied with reporting it, he gave all the details. After that I said ‘Alexei Stepanovich, Gontar needs to be smartened up’; and he replied: ‘It’s not my duty to smarten you all up. Chernyavin’s case is different, he only arrived yesterday, but Gontar’s been with us for five years.’ Then I said to him: ‘Zyriansky finds something to complain of everywhere.’ That finished it. First, he said, it’s against the regulations to argue while the report’s being made; second, in the eighth detachment report you gave there’s a note about Misha Gontar’s slovenliness. For not knowing how to behave during reporting time and for slovenliness in the detachment—one hour’s detention.”

They all gaped at him in silence.

“Didn’t you answer him back?” asked the astonished Igor, who had quite forgotten about his own worries.

All eyes were turned on him, as if he were a tiresome nuisance. Yet Ostapchin did not ignore his question.

“Of course I answered back: ‘Very good, one hour’s detention, Comrade Director.’”

Nesterenko was again swept by a gale of laughter.

“That’s wonderful! What a good thing I sent you!”

“You’ll not get me to go again....”

“You just try not to,” Nesterenko replied gaily, with a friendly shake of the fist. “It’s for your own mistake that you’re getting it, not for mine. You’re such a blabber that you can’t even get through a report without doing it. Who would think of saying such a thing as that about the commander on duty? Just imagine! What surprises me is your getting off so lightly. Alexei must be feeling kind today.”

Igor suddenly felt offended. What the hell were they up to? It was as clear as anything that Ostapchin had been given an hour’s detention without deserving it, while the one who was really guilty, Misha Gontar, was getting off scot-free. But what really offended him was something else: why were they all, including Alexei Stepanovich, interested in such trivial things like Gontar’s finger-nail parings, yet nobody paid any attention to Igor Chernyavin’s public and demonstrative refusal to work.

When all were ready for bed Zyriansky came into the dormitory, no longer wearing an arm band. He was met with happy looks and the boys crowded round him as he sank in exhaustion on a bench.

“Ostapchin got it in the neck!” he said. “I’m sure Alexei’s sitting in his office this very moment and laughing to himself as he remembers how Alexander Ostapchin came to report. As a matter of fact he reported very well, better than any of the others!”

But Zyriansky didn’t say a word about Igor, he didn’t even remember that he was in that dormitory and that he had that day demonstratively refused to work in the assembly-shop.

Igor was up in good time the next morning and spent long over his bed-making. He would, perhaps, have slept longer had he not forgotten to enquire the evening before who would be on duty that day. He didn't want to be found in bed again before one of the "ladies."

As it turned out he did well because the inspection was carried out by Zakharov himself, accompanied by Lida Talikova, the commander on duty. Zakharov, who was wearing a Russian blouse, was in gay mood.

"Good morning, comrades!" he called, raising his arm like any commander on duty.

Igor had the impression that there was more friendliness and affection in the reply than the commanders got; but, at the same time, he felt the boys stood very much in awe of Zakharov. He inspected the dormitory without being finical and left it to the small nimble representative of the Sanitary Commission to pry into hiding-places. But Zakharov did not neglect asking Gontar to show him his finger-nails, a touch which made Ostapchin reddened merrily, though this was lost on Zakharov. Igor he passed by, callously.

"Do you happen to know what film's on today, Alexei Stepanovich?" asked Nesterenko.

"I've heard it's 'The Battle-Cruiser Potemkin.' Did they go for the reels, Lida?"

"Yes."

Just before he left, Zakharov looked up at the electric lamp. There was a chorus of protest.

"There are little spots in the glass! It's the way it's made! We're always talking about it, but nobody ever gives us a new one!"

"What's all the noise for?" Zakharov asked from the door.

"You looked at the lamp."

"What's where I look got to do with your shouting?"

"Oh, we know what your looks mean all right!"

Igor went to breakfast. Nobody said a word to him on the way there and at table Zorin and Gontar talked loudly to each other about something they happened to remember. Nesterenko ate in silence, looking round the room.

A hundred people sat in the dining-hall each shift. They were placed at small tables with white tablecloths, and, to tell the truth, Igor found them all much to his liking. Although he had only spent four days in the colony he already knew many of its members. He knew the Sanitary Commission boys and girls, all very much alike, neat, exacting and strict, most of them fourteen or fifteen years old. He had grown familiar with other faces too in each one of them Igor unconsciously distinguished two sides of the owner's character. Each face had its own look, something boyish which Igor could not find a name for, but which spelt obvious energy, aggressiveness, a spirit of mischief and pugnacity, and an independent, roguish, and efficient keen glance difficult to avoid—all more or less familiar types of face and habit which Igor had seen before and grown to like. On the other hand, he could clearly make out other traits of character among all these colonists. His registering of these was also quite unconscious, and he did not even tell himself with any conviction that these traits stemmed specifically from the colony,

but- they were something he had not noticed anywhere else before and they attracted him, yet, at the same time aroused in him a vague feeling of protest.

All this crowd sitting- in the dining-hall, he had to admit, formed one friendly family, close-knit, and proud of its community spirit. What specially appealed to Igor was the fact that he had not noticed in all these four days a single quarrel or row, not even a difference of opinion, or an angry or quarrelsome tone of voice worth mentioning. At first he had put it down to their all being afraid of Zakharov or the commanders. Well, that might be so, but, for some reason, their fear wasn't noticeable. The commanders on duty and the detachment commanders, it was true, gave their orders confidently, without any doubt in their being fulfilled, and they spoke like real commanders, as if they were used to the job and had been running the place for years. Yet Sancho had told him that most of the commanders were new to their posts, only Nesterenko and Zyriansky having held them for longer than six months. Besides that, Igor had noticed that not only the commanders, but all the rest of them, too, exercised power with self-assurance when they were given the smallest scrap of it for the course of a day; there was no uncertainty, the colonists took to running the show as something quite natural,⁶ something that was expected of them. It was the same with the Sanitary Commission, the dining-hall and dormitory monitors, and the sentries at the main entrance.

These sentries were usually appointed from among the little chaps, those who ran about in the park squealing, tumbled into the pond or disported themselves on the apparatus on the sports-ground. They had all kinds of faces and gaits and ways of talking and behaving themselves; some of them were "pests" who went around grinning and teasing, fibbers and spinners of wild yarns, lads with all kinds of queer ideas in their heads. But no sooner had one of these fellows taken a rifle in his hand than he was transformed into someone like that Petka Kravchuk who had met Igor when he arrived. Like Petka they became' serious, alert, tried to speak in deep voices and were highly impressive and official. Their duties were not complicated: to let no stranger into the building and to make sure that everybody wiped his feet. No passes were issued in the colony either for grown-ups or colonists, the sentries knowing very well by sight who was allowed in and who wasn't. As for the feet-wiping, they all were equally merciless and implacable, Igor had seen himself, the day before, how one of these sentries had stopped Vitya Torsky when he rushed in from the yard on some urgent business.

"Your feet, Vitya!"

"I'm in a terrible hurry, Shurka!"

But Shurka just turned away without even repeating the order. And Vitya Torsky, the head of *all* this republic, only hesitated for a second and then came down half the flight of stairs back to the shoe-cleaning rag, while Shurka looked on to see he did the job properly.

Here in the colony they were a united society, cemented together by something' Igor could not fathom. Sometimes a strange idea occurred to him that all of them, the older boys and the small fry, as well as, the girls, got together behind the scenes to draw up, in the strictest secrecy, a set of rules which they kept to fairly, and the more difficult the rules the prouder they were in keeping to them. And sometimes he had the impression that this entire game with its rules had been thought up on purpose, just to make him into an object of fun and derision, and to see how he would play the game without knowing its

rules. The annoying thing was that the whole game was played in such a way as if it didn't exist, as if things just had to be done that way and in no other, such as always having to salute the commander on duty when you met him, or calling a neglected patch of yard an assembly-shop where countless struts had to be rubbed down.

That was the reason why Igor was reluctant to surrender, in spite of being drawn towards this proud and merry community. He didn't expect to be left off lightly; all these cheerful and good-natured lads and lasses were only pretending that Igor didn't exist and that the presence of one slacker and drone among all this mass of workers was not a source of irritation to anyone. He was well aware that a moment must come when they would all pounce on him and try to force him to work. Very interesting it would be to see how they'd set about it! They'd no right to use force. Would they starve him to submission? No, that, too, was against the law. Let him go on staying at the colony without working? Hardly that! Expel him? That, of course, they wouldn't want to do. Well, it remained to be seen.

Igor was having breakfast and admiring the colonists. They were all in school uniforms, looking fresh and clean; and they chattered to each other, laughed quietly and sometimes pulled faces. They shot glances at the nice-looking commander on duty Lida Talikova, who walked from table to table.

There she was at the next table. A dark-complexioned boy raised his eyes to her.

"Why have you carted all those hooks along with you to the dining-hall, Filka?" she asked.

Filka Shary stood up.

"I just had to, I wanted to read the rules once more," he replied.

"You're too lazy to go back to the dormitory after breakfast for the books, isn't that the reason?"

Shary didn't say anything to that, he turned away with an expression on his face that said: She's not got much more to say, I can bear it.

"What do you mean by turning away?" the commander continued.

Shary grew offended.

"I don't mean anything. What else do you expect me to say?"

"That you won't let it happen again! It's against the rules to bring school-books into the dining-hall. What's more, you shouldn't turn away when I speak to you." Shary sighed with relief and raised his arm.

"Very good, Comrade Commander on duty, I'll not bring books in."

When Lida had moved away all four clipped heads drew together; there was some whispering, then a glance from one of the boys at Lida, then more whispering. Lida approached Igor and their eyes were on him, too.

"Are you going to work today, Chernyavin?"

Igor opened his mouth. Gontar spoke sternly:

"Get up."

Igor rose to his feet.

"I'm not going to work."

"You know we're short off hands, don't you?" .

"I don't intend to become a carpenter."

"What if we should be attacked by an enemy? Would you say then that you didn't intend to become a soldier?" Lida expounded gently.

"Oh, that'd be another matter."

Filka Shary, the boy who had just been reprimanded by the commander on duty, made his comment on this for the benefit of his own table but he spoke so loudly that it was heard throughout the dining-hall:

"Quite another matter! Then he'd bolt under his bed!"

Lida cast a stern glance at Shary. He smiled back at her with mischievous brotherly gaiety.

"So you're not going to work?" she went on.

"I'm not."

Lida jotted something down in her pad and went away.

After dinner Igor was reading a book. It was called *Partisans* and he had found it on Zorin's bed-side locker. Begunok came into the dormitory and stood at attention near the door.

"Comrade Chernyavin! The Secretary of the Commanders' Council has called a council meeting at five o'clock. You're to be there. You've got to explain your behaviour."

"All right."

"Will you come on your own or do you have to be brought?" Volodya asked mouthing the word "brought" seriously to stress its gravity.

"I'll come."

"Well, take care that you're at the council meeting at five."

There was silence.

"Why don't you answer?"

Igor looked at Begunok's serious, challenging face, jumped up and said with a chuckle:

"Very good, comrade, five o'clock at the council meeting!"

"Be sure!" cautioned Begunok and vanished.

28

After the Rain

At four o'clock there -was a thunderstorm. Its claps broke over the woods regularly and merrily as if in fulfilment of some previous agreement. It smote the colony; then came the rain, strong and steady. The small fry ran about in it bare to their waists, shouting things to each other. Then the thunder shifted towards the city leaving over the

colony a few busy clouds which spilled warm gentle rain. The boys ran off to get dressed. People of better standing who had waited for the end of the downpour ran quickly on their toes from building to building. At the main entrance stood Lyuba Rotshicin, neatly-dressed, pink-cheeked and armed with a rifle. Beside her a veritable field of dry sacking lay spread out on the floor. Today everybody was accosted without distinction of person.

“Your feet!”

“Wipe your feet, Bogatov!”

“Mind you don’t forget, Belenky!”

Lyuba did not conceal her disapproval of the lads who had taken a drenching in the storm.

“Whatever you say, I won’t let you pass.”

“But look, Lyuba, I’ve wiped my feet.”

“You’re dripping wet all the same.”

“Do you mean I’ve to wait till I’m dry?”

“That’s right.”

“It’ll take a long time.”

But Lyuba did not reply and looked away angrily. The lad uttered a long loud cry, directed towards someone at an upstairs window who was not to be seen and, perhaps, was not even there.

“Kolka! Kolka! Kolka!” At last someone looked out.

“What’s up?”

“Throw a towel down, will you?”

A moment later the lad, quite red with rubbing, presents a smiling face to Lyuba and runs into the hall.

At five o’clock, Begunok sounded the call for the Commanders’ Council, took a look at the rain, and went indoors.

A little boy who was soaked to the skin, hatless, down-at-heel, emaciated and pale came creeping to the main entrance. It was Vanya Galchenko. He stopped before the door and took a cautious look at the superb Lyuba.

“Where are you from, boy?” she asked him.

“I ... I’ve walked here...”

“I can see that for myself. What do you want?”

“Will they take me in the colony?”

“H’m, you’re quick off the mark! Have you got a voucher?”

“A voucher?”

“Have you got any sort of document?”

“No, nothing at all.”

“Well, what are we to do? We can’t let you in without anything.”

Vanya shrugged his shoulders as he stared fixedly at Lyuba. She smiled at him.

"Why are you getting soaked out there?" she asked, "Come and stand here. They won't let you in, though."

Vanya entered the porch. He stood on the sacking and watched the rain falling. He looked at Lyuba and raised a hand to dash his tears away.

At the moment, Igor Chernyavin was standing in the middle of the room of the Commanders' Council "explaining his behaviour." There were many people in the room. Not only the commanders but other colonists too, some forty in all, were scaled on the long benches. From the eighth detachment, besides Nesterenko, there were Zorin, Gontar and Ostapchin. Next to Zorin sat large-eyed black-haired Mark Grinhaus, the Secretary of the Komsomol organization. He was smiling sadly, lost in thought, perhaps about something personal or perhaps about Igor Chernyavin, one couldn't tell. At the Secretariat table sat Vitya Torsky and Alexei Stepanovich Zakharov. There were some small fry standing at the door, headed by Volodya Begunok. Everybody was listening carefully to what Igor had to say.

"It isn't that I don't want to work," he expostulated. "It's just that I don't want to work in the assembly-shop. It doesn't suit me there, you see. What's the sense in polishing struts?"

He fell silent and scrutinized the faces of those seated around him. He was pleased to see that they looked irritated and impatient. He smiled and glanced at the director. Zakharov's expression was impassive. He was carefully and fixedly sharpening a pencil with a small penknife over a large ash-tray.

"May I speak?" asked Gontar.

Torsky nodded. Gontar rose and thrust out his right arm.

"It's a lot of rot and nonsense! How many more of his sort are we going to get here? I've lived in this colony five years and we've had about thirty of the young toffs like him in this room."

"A good sight more than that," someone corrected him.

"And every one of them gives us the same line of talk. I've had my fill of 'eon. So he doesn't want to be a fitter! Have you asked him what he can do other than guzzle and sleep? Comes here, he does, gets himself cleaned up and stands up in front of us and says: 'I won't be a fitter.' And what's he going to turn out into? You can guess what! A parasite, you can see that plain enough! Oh, I can understand us getting one or two like him, but just think how many of them we've had. And we go on talking it over and talking it over. What I propose is that we strip him, give him back his rags and chuck him out! Chuck one out and all the rest of them will hear about it."

"That's right!" shouted Zyriansky.

"Don't interrupt," Torsky checked him. "You can't have your say later."

"Oh, I've got nothing to say. He's not worth talking about any more, is he? He doesn't want to be a carpenter; well, we're all carpenters, aren't we? Why should we feed him, that's what I want to know? Chuck him out, show him the road."

"We can't just turn him out, he'd go to the dogs," said Nesterenko calmly.

“Well, let him. It’d serve him right.”

The council bawled its approval.

“Let’s end the discussion and take a vote,” said someone in a high childlike voice.

Igor bent his ears attentively in the hope of hearing something more favourable to his cause. Zakharov was still busy sharpening his pencil. “They may really chuck me out, it seems!” flashed through his mind. And suddenly he felt unusually alarmed.

...Outside at the main entrance Lyuba was questioning unhappy little Vanya.

“Where do you live?”

“Nowhere.”

“What do you mean, nowhere? Generally speaking, are you dead or alive?”

“Generally speaking? Oh, in general I’m alive, but the way it is now, well ... I don’t really live anywhere.”

“Where do you spend the nights?”

“Generally speaking, you mean?”

“What do you talk that silly way for? Where did you spend last night?”

“Over there... at a house... I slept in the shed. Why won’t they let me in here?”

“We haven’t room and we don’t know who you are.”

Vanya grew sad again and once more he felt like crying.

29

Anything you like...

In the Commanders’ Council Mark Grinhaus was speaking. He had left his place on the bench and stood leaning with one hand on the desk. Zakharov had (finished sharpening his pencil and was doodling carefully on a sheet of paper. Mark spoke slowly and quietly, making every word tell.

“How many times has it been said here that we can’t just chuck people out like that? Alexei Stepanovich has also been firm on that point. Where are we going to chuck him out to? Into the street? We haven’t the right to do that, of course we haven’t!”

Grinhaus fixed his large dark eyes on Zyriansky. The latter read the abundance of human kindness in those eyes. He rejected it and gazed fervently back at Grinhaus.

“No, Alyosha, we haven’t the right,” Mark repeated. “There is a Soviet law which we have to respect. According to that, nobody can be turned out into the street. Yet, Comrades Commanders, you’re always bawling: chuck him out!”

“What are we to do?” cried Gontar. “Just go on looking at him and putting up with the way he acts?”

“We can’t chuck him out,” Grinhaus pressed on, emphasizing his words with jerks of his head, “but of course, we can’t put up with his behaviour, because we belong to the socialist sector where everybody must work. Igor says: I’ll work somewhere else. We can’t allow that either; there’s got to be discipline in the socialist sector. If you look

round the whole of our colony you'll not find a single person who says he wants to be a fitter. We're all studying; we know that there are many paths lying before us and all of them splendid ones. One fellow wants to be an airman, another a geologist, someone else wants to join the army, but nobody plans to become an assembly-worker; why, there really isn't such a profession! We can't stand nonsense of any sort in our colony, but, all the same, we can't chuck people out."

"Pickle him in a jar of methylated spirit!"

Grinhaus turned to where this remark came from. Petka Kravchuk, red to his curly forelock, met his look squarely, for he had not liked Grinhaus's speech at all.

"Don't interrupt!" Vitya Torsky enjoined Kravchuk.

"If you've sneaked in here, the least you can do is to keep quiet."

Grinhaus, however, did not take his eyes off Kravchuk.

"We can't turn him out," he said in explanation, "but I'm not proposing he should stay. If he doesn't want to respect socialist discipline we must send him somewhere else."

Nesterenko looked calmly somewhere beyond Grinhaus.

"What sector are you thinking of sending him to, Mark?" he enquired.

There was laughter in which the commanders joined the rest. Zakharov gave Grinhaus an affectionate look that was not devoid of irony.

"He ought to be sent to some sort of children's home," said Grinhaus with a sad smile.

This threw Petka Kravchuk into transports of delight. He sprang up high on the bench, shoved somebody aside, and uttered a piercing cry with no trace of the assumed bass notes in it.

"I think that's a fine idea, I do! Let's put him in our kindergarten—the one for the staff's kids!"

Vitya Torsky, who had joined in the general laughter, frowned and said:

"Get out, Petka!"

"What for?"

"I said get out."

Kravchuk's salute was more of a gesture of protest.

"Very good, Comrade Commander!" he said, and left, followed by Begunok. Everybody could hear them talking and laughing loudly in the passage. Zakharov went on drawing something on his sheet of paper. He narrowed his eyes very slightly.

No sooner had Volodya Begunok leaped out on to the porch than he saw Vanya Galchenko. "So you've come!" he cried.

"Yes! Now what do I have to do?" asked the delighted Vanya.

"Wait for me here! I'll be back in a moment!"

Begunok dashed back into the vestibule but returned immediately.

"Do you want something to eat?" he enquired. "Eat!" echoed Vanya. "You know—I'd rather. . . ."

“Wait here! Just a minute!”

Volodya returned gingerly to the council room. As before, Igor was standing in the middle and you could see that he felt ashamed of being there and facing the looks of the people present and listening to proposals like Kravchuk’s. Even Torsky felt sorry for him.

“You can sit down for a bit. Move up, fellows, Volenko has the floor.”

Begunok raised a hand.

“Please allow the commander on duty to leave the room, Vitya.”

“What for?”

“It’s very, very important.”

“You can go, Lida. What’s happening out there?”

Lida Talikova walked out, with Volodya skipping in front of her.

Volenko rose, looking grave.

“That’s always Zyriansky’s way: let anything happen and it’s: Chuck him out. If he’d had his way, there’d be nobody but Zyriansky left in the colony now.

“That’s not true,” protested Zyriansky, “there are plenty of good comrades.”

“What about it? They didn’t suddenly become good, did they? Where are you going to turn him out to? Where are you going to send him? That’s our misfortune. We get sissies sent here and it’s our duty to look after them. Who’s been put in charge of Chernyavin?”

“Zorin has.”

“Well, let Zorin be responsible for him.”

There was a buzz of disapproval. Zorin sprang from his seat.

“Thanks a lot, Volenko! Take him into (he first detachment and look after him yourself!”

Volenko turned an indulgent look on Zorin.

“That wasn’t the remark of a good comrade, Sancho: Your eighth detachment’s got nothing but philosophers in it, but I’ve got—let’s count—Levitin, Nozhik, Moskovchenko, that fellow Ruslan—that makes four beginners, while your lot are all full colonists. You get one queer fellow shoved on to you and not a moment’s passed before you’re bawling for him to be chucked out.”

Igor was now sitting between Nesterenko and the commander of the second detachment, Porshnev. The way Volenko had spoken made him feel somewhat better but at the same time an unpleasant feeling of vexation was raging in his breast. Why should they treat him as if he were a bug? Yes, a bug that had come into their garden, and they were examining it and asking each other whether it would do any good or harm. They talked about other bugs they remembered. None of them wanted to pay attention to the fact that it was Igor Chernyavin who was sitting in front of them, and not some Nozhik or Ruslan who’d never dare to refuse to work.

... At the main entrance Lida Talikova was looking at Vanya and feeling sorry for him; but on this day she had the heart of a commander on duty and this heart forced her to say:

“So you want to be let in the colony do you? Who knows who you are? Perhaps you’re just making it all up!”

Vanya exerted all his strength trying to make what he had to say to this strict girl particularly important, but the phrases that emerged were one and the same: “I’ve nothing... no money. .. nowhere to sleep. I went to the Komones and I went to the Spon . . . just the same there... nothing.”

“What about your parents?”

“My parents?” Vanya echoed, and suddenly burst into tears. He cried silently, without wrinkling his face, the tears simply welling out of his eyes.

Begunok gripped Lida by the arm.

“You see, Lida, don’t you? We’ve got to take him,” he said, hotly.

Lida smiled into Begunok’s flaming eyes.

“Really.”

“Word of honour! Just think!”

“Wait here,” said Lida, and went quickly into the house.

Begunok hastened after her.

“Don’t be scared,” he told Vanya before he left. “The main thing is not to be scared. Keep your chin up, you understand?”

Vanya nodded. Of course he understood, but that did not help him to keep his chin up.

... In the Commanders’ Council Alexei Stepanovich was speaking. He still held his sharp pencil in his hand. He spoke sternly, glancing occasionally in Igor’s direction.

“You really ought to get such easy questions as this straight in your mind, Chernyavin. You came to us here and we were glad to have you. We’ve taken you into the family circle. You can’t go on thinking now only about yourself, you’ve got to think about all of us, too, about the colony as a whole. Man cannot live on his own. You’ve got to learn to love the collective, get to know it, find out what its interests are, and share them. You can’t be a real man without doing that. Of course, rubbing down struts isn’t interesting to you personally just now, but it’s in the colony’s interests and that means you’ve got to make it your interest too. Besides that, it’s important to you, as well. Try and reach your target, one hundred and sixty struts in four hours. That’s a big job; it requires strength of will, patience, perseverance. It means working with a fine spirit. Your arms and shoulders will ache in the evening, for you will have polished struts for one hundred and twenty theatre-seats. That’s an important Soviet job. In the old days, only people living in the big cities used to go to the theatre, but now we are turning out one thousand seats a month, which far from meets the demand—and, mind you, we’re not the only people making them. Just think what an important job we’re doing! Every month we’re sending a thousand seats to places all over the Soviet Union, whole truck-loads to Moscow, Odessa, Astrakhan, Voronezh. People come and sit on the seats we’ve made and watch plays or films or listen to lectures or study. And here are you asking why you need to do that job! Another thing, we get paid for this work, and with the money we get we shall be able, in a year or ‘two, to build a new factory, which we and our country as a whole need. It’s disgusting to hear you saying; I’m not planning

to become an assembly-worker. As a member of our collective you will get help from us to become whatever you want to be. But this I fuss about struts is sheer nonsense. When people can't get meat they eat black bread, and have to be thankful for it."

Igor was listening carefully. He liked the way Zakharov put things. Igor formed in his mind a picture of struts being distributed throughout the land, and liked it. He saw how the colonists, who, apparently, didn't often have a chance of hearing Zakharov speak, were hanging on to his words with bated breath. Now he clearly understood why all the members of the colony formed a single community and why they valued highly what Zakharov had to say.

Lida Talikova and Begunok entered and stood at the door. Zakharov came to a close, glanced at the point of his pencil and smiled for the first time.

"What's worrying you now, Lida?"

"Alexei Stepanovich! There's a little boy out there crying and asking to be let in the colony."

"Let him stay overnight but there's no room for him in the colony. We'll send him on somewhere."

"He's such a nice little boy."

Lida's agitation made Zakharov smile once more.

"Oh! All right... bring him in," he grumbled.

Lida went out, with Begunok following her like a whirlwind. Torsky looked askance with his stern eyes that missed nothing.

"You have the last word, Chernyavin. But talk sense, Come out in the middle and speak."

Igor came out and placed his hand on his chest.

"Comrades!" he said. Then he looked at them. There was nothing to be learned from their faces; they simply waited.

"I'm not lazy, comrades! It's easier for you, you're used to working. That rasp there, it's the first I've ever seen, I dropped it—and those struts...."

"And those flies!" Zorin prompted.

Everybody laughed, though somewhat reluctantly.

"They weren't flies. They were beasts flying around. ..."

"And growling," Zorin concluded.

During a burst of laughter, now less chilly, the *door* opened and Lida stepped in, preceded by Vanya Galchenko. And before the laughter had died down Igor caught sight of the little boy. 'He swung round, stared hard, and uttered a loud cry of delight.

"Vanya, pal!"

"Igor!" Vanya exclaimed with a groan, "swallowing hard.

Igor had already set about joyfully pummelling Vanya.

"What have you been up to?" he asked,

“Order, order, Chernyavin! Have you forgotten where you are?” thundered the indignant Torsky.

Igor turned round to face him, pulled himself together, and, raising his arm with fresh zest, addressed the council.

“Oh yes, Milords!”

His words were infused with such ardour and deep emotion and affection that they made everybody laugh again, but now the eyes that were turned on him conveyed warm and lively interest and were quite devoid of aloofness.

“Comrades, I’ll do anything you like! If it’s struts, let it be struts! Whatever you say, Alexei Stepanovich! But let this fellow stay!”

“What about the flies?”

“To hell with the flies!”

Victor nodded to the empty seat.

“Sit down for a bit, sit down.”

30

The glorious and invincible fourth detachment

“Now tell us what you want,” Torsky said to Vanya.

Vanya looked around and at once liked everything he saw — Igor’s familiar broad smile, the friendly presence of Volodya Begunok and the girl with the red arm band.

“You know what?” he replied, easily. “I’m going to live here.”

“That remains to be seen.”

But Vanya was already sure about his future.

“Yes, I am,” he continued, “I’ve spent *a* whole month getting here.”

“Are you a wail?”

“No ... not yet.”

“What’s your name?”

“Vanya Galchenko.”

“Have you got any parents?”

Vanya did not answer this question but just jerked his head without dropping his eyes from Torsky.

“Does that mean no?”

“I had some once... but they went away.”

“Both of them? Father and mother? Did they both leave?”

“No, not my father and mother.”

“Not much sense in that is there? Now explain things more clearly.”

"Clearly? My father and mother died a long time ago, during the war. Father went to the front and mother died."

"So your parents are dead?"

"After they died there were some others. There was a man there who took me, so I lived with him. Then he married and went away."

"Just left you?"

"No, they didn't leave me. They told me to go to the station and buy a pound of mutton, I went there and looked everywhere, but couldn't find any mutton. That's when they packed up and left."

"You mean you came home and they'd gone?"

"Yes, gone. There wasn't anything there. No parents, no clothes. Everything had gone. The man who lived in (the house—he owned it—said I might as well look for a needle in a haystack."

"And afterwards?"

"Then I made a stand and cleaned boots. I went to the city."

"I see," drawled Torsky. "What do you think, Comrades Commanders?"

"He's all right. And then where can he go? We ought to take him," said Nesterenko.

"But we've got no room," somebody remarked, in an undertone.

"Let me have a word, Torsky," Begunok exclaimed from near the door.

"Go on."

"I'll take him along with me. We'll be together. He can share my bed."

Zyriansky, who had been taking a good look at Vanya all this time, drew the boy towards him with a mark of approval.

"You're right, Volodya, we'll have him in the fourth detachment."

Then Igor rose.

"I'd like him to be in the eighth detachment if that's possible. I'm also willing to sacrifice fifty per cent of my living-space."

Volodya took offence.

"Just listen to him!" he said with a jerk of his head in Igor's direction. "You're a new boy yourself and you talk about wanting him in the eighth detachment, while your commander doesn't say a word! Maybe you're speaking for him!"

"That's no way to talk, Volodya!" Torsky interjected loudly.

Volodya moved across to the door but kept his dark, furious eyes on Igor, his full lips working the while in some muttered comments which, it was plain, concerned Igor too.

Several commanders put in a few brief phrases: "We ought to take him; he's not been spoiled yet." "He's a sound little fellow, you can see that. Let's have him." "He's all right. He's managed to keep clear of all those well-meaning women out there. He'll make a man all right. You'll not find anybody who'd want to have him turned out of the colony."

“Why are you all saying one and the same thing?” asked Klava Kashirina impatiently. “Of course he ought to be let in. It’s only for Alexei Stepanovich to *say* how to fit it in to the rules.”

She had support in this suggestion. Faces were turned towards Zakharov in expectation. But Volodya Begunok broke in before the director could reply.

“Wait a bit! Wait a bit!” he cried. “There’s something I want to say. Do you remember, Alexei Stepanovich, how last year a fellow came—what was his name?—yes, I remember—Grishka Sinichka—the’ one who’s in the tenth detachment now with you, Ilyusha? There was talk about not taking him, either. People said there was no room for him and the rules didn’t permit it. Well, he wasn’t taken. So he went and lived in the forest for a fortnight. Then he came back here. He wasn’t let in then, either. ‘What nerve!’ you said. ‘We’ve turned him down, yet he still goes on hanging around in the forest.’ You took him off to the town, to the Spon, you did, Nesterenko, remember?”

“I did,” said Nesterenko with a sheepish smile.

“Yes, you took him, and he bolted from you when you were in the tram, remember?”

“Oh, shut up! I remember all right.”

“He ran away and went on living in the forest again. Then you stepped in, Alexei Stepanovich, and said: ‘Damn the fellow, let’s take him.’ And we all laughed about it.”

It was obvious they had done, because this time, too, smiles spread over their faces. Only one voice was raised against Begunok’s statement. It came from the commander of the third detachment, the ill-featured gloomy-looking Bratsan.

“In my opinion, too much freedom’s being given to fellows like Volodya,” he said. “He thinks that if he’s a bugler and goes round with the commander on duty all day, he can start making speeches in the Commanders’ Council. Now if you had your way we’d let everybody in! You don’t seem to realize what kind of colony this is.”

“I know. You think it’s for juvenile delinquents!”

“That’s right.”

“That’s absolutely wrong.”

“Enough, you two!” said Torsky to close the debate.

But Volenko was of the opinion that an important question had been raised.

“No, Vitya let them go on. Bratsan ought to be answered.”

“Well, why don’t you answer him?”

“Yes, he ought to be answered. Bratsan had some queer ideas ‘for a long time.’”

“What do you mean, queer ideas?”

“That’s what I said!”

“Carry on, Volenko.”

“All right. In your view, Bratsan, a juvenile delinquent is a human being and all the rest just scum. I don’t know whether you were a delinquent or not, and I don’t want to know it. I know you as a good comrade and a good Komsomol member. Are you proud of having been up before the court? Take that chap Golotovskiy in your detachment. He

was 'never a delinquent, that's certain, but all the same I don't trust him. What's more, none of you do: it's almost a year since he entered the third detachment, but he's not yet got his colonist title."

Volenko had no more to say, but Bratsan was clearly unconvinced. He sat with the same angry look on his face.

"Alexei Stepanovich has the floor!"

"You were wrong to start this argument, Bratsan. Delinquents are children who have to be helped before anybody else. That's the way Soviet power looks at the matter. And there is no reason for them to get high and mighty. Fancy feeling proud of misfortune! And now a little boy turns up. He's had a misfortune, too, and he, too, ought to be helped."

"But why should our colony go in for first-aid?"

"Because you're working splendidly and living splendidly, too, in this colony. Now we have the Spon and the Komones each talking proudly about the colony as 'their' place! If we were doing badly they'd be singing a very different song and saying we were none of their business. In fact, this colony is"

"Ours!" bawled Petka Kravchuk from near the door.

Raising his voice above the general roar of laughter, Torsky exclaimed indignantly:

"Well, look at that! Here he is again! The matter's cleared up now, I'll take a vote: who is for admitting Vanya Galchenko into the fourth detachment?"

Vanya's heart missed a beat as the hands went up around him. Keeping one eye on Bratsan he was surprised to see that he was smiling and that his face was now handsome and not at all grim.

"Unanimous, let him in. Hey, what's the entire din for? So Chernyavin stays in the assembly-shop as before. Besides that, he gave his word of honour. I declare the Commanders' Council 'closed."

There was an atmosphere of gaiety in the fourth detachment dormitory that evening. Zyriansky stood Vanya between his knees, shot questions at him, played jokes, bewildered him. Later they all sat round the table and told him how glorious and invincible and full of fighting spirit was their fourth detachment in this First of May Labour Colony and what splendid fellows they, all were. Even Zyriansky, the terror of the whole colony, for whom they got up half an hour earlier to prepare for inspection when he was on duty, was finding it hard not to smile as, with shining eyes, he poured out frank enthusiastic words about the fourth detachment.

"It's not a detachment; it's a veritable cream-trifle! What good chaps we have in it, Vanya! So many, I don't really know who's the best of 'em, though we've got the youngest of all with us. Just look at 'em: this is Tosya Talikov, you've only got to see him to know he's a future commander, like his sister who's already commander of the eleventh detachment. And that's Begun ok! And Filka Shary! And Kirill Novak! And Fedya and Kolya Ivanov! And Stmyon Gaidovsky. And Semyon Gladun! And Petka Kravchuk, of course."

All kinds of faces were turned towards Vanya. Some were dark-complexioned, others rosy-cheeked, some were handsome and some were not; there were faces that expressed trustfulness explicitly, and others where the trustfulness had an underlying tinge of irony; faces that were gay, faces that were comically serious, faces, where the frowns came easily and others whose owners had to strain themselves to frown; but there was happiness in all these faces, together with pride in their detachment and its commander, and gratification that they lived in a Soviet world with honour, and that they knew how to defend their honour. Later on Zyriansky that he would list their faults naming only one for each person, albeit the main fault. He said that Begunok set too high a store by his own importance, that Petka Kravchuk put on airs because he'd been a delinquent in the old days, that Novak considered himself to be the best-looking boy of the lot, that Gaidovsky thought... in a word they all suffered from the same blemish: they all thought a lot about themselves, put on airs and were too proud of themselves....

"You ought never to boast about yourself," Zyriansky concluded, "because it's awfully stupid and doesn't suit the fourth detachment. Far better to be praised by me when the occasion arises. Detachment monitor!"

Begunok jumped up from his place at the table and stood to attention before the commander. "Detachment monitor reporting!" "Give Vanya his trappings, will you?" "Very good, Comrade Commander!" Volodya ceremoniously brought a bundle of things to Vanya.

"Here you are, Galchenko! Your shorts, your undershirt, your skull-cap. Here's a cake of soap. Here's your belt. Sheets. Your towel. You'll get your school uniform tomorrow. Let's go. That's where the hot shower is. Who's taking charge of Vanya?" "That's your job."

"Very good, Comrade Commander! Hand me the clippers, Alyosha, now we'll go and...." Begunok made an expressive gesture with his fingers.

At that moment, Igor Chernyavin poked his head round the door.

"May I join you?" "Yes. Come in."

"I know you wanted to chuck me out but I've not taken offence."

"It's not a custom here to take offence."

Vanya stared at Igor.

"Chuck you out? What for?" he asked.

"He's a big shot! Why, he may have come in for some money!"

"Maybe from his grandmother!" chortled Vanya.

Igor put his arms round Vanya and lifted him off the ground.

"Look here, Vanya, where's your stand?" he asked, lowering him to the floor again.

"That fellow Ryzhikov pinched it. The ten roubles, too."

"And where's Wanda?"

"I don't know."

Begunok tugged impatiently at Vanya's arm.

"Come on," he said.

The two boys ran off along the passage.

“Don’t take offence, Igor,” Zyriansky said with a smile. “We call it hot-tempering the metal here,”

PART TWO

1

It’s Impossible

The First of May Colony had been in existence for seven years, but the collective of which it was composed was considerably older. Its history started a relatively long time ago, in 1917, on the very first day after the October Revolution and in quite different surroundings—the plains and farmsteads of the Poltava steppe. The “founder members” of this collective were people of picturesque character and adventurous fortune. They brought with them from their “free life” sundry disorderly passions and hot-blooded swaggering ways which were all half-baked and good for nothing, because they were spoiled by a frilling of what might be called capitalist culture, with a slight tendency towards criminality.

Through a casual distribution of work, this modest sector of the revolutionary front was placed in the charge of a small band of educationists, ordinary people of good will headed by Zakharov, who was himself nothing out of the ordinary. What was amazing and extraordinary about those early days was the October Revolution itself and the new world horizons it opened. That is why Zakharov and his companions saw their task clearly defined as the shaping of a new type of man! It did not take long for them to realize that this was going to be a very difficult and protracted business. Thousands of days and nights passed, a period when they knew neither respite nor calm, nor joy, yet they were still very far away from this new type of man. Fortunately, Zakharov was endowed with a gift that is to be found quite widespread on the eastern plains of Europe—the gift of optimism, of a tremendous zeal for the future. It is in essence, not a gift but a particular, purely intellectual property of the Russian man, a man with a good share of sound judgment and a keen eye. Before the October Revolution, the people who ran the country’s affairs gambled with this spiritual wealth and faith, transforming faith into credulity and optimism into recklessness, and appraising these qualities as attributes of a “specially Russian” quality of toleration. As a result, the people’s belief in reason, in a scale of values, in truth and integrity, was usually thrust out of practical life into the realm of legend, fairy-tale, and stories invented for entertainment. The provincial stamp was imprinted on the Russian people’s quality of optimism, and on it was to be read that motto of self-humiliating humour: “maybe, probably, somehow or other.” Optimism was confined to a respectable humble corner where one might both laugh-at it with Europeanized snobbery and weep over it with Russian longing.

Suitable for both the snobbery and the longing, a high-class white marble monument was erected in that very corner, and inscribed with the following inspired lines:

How can the stranger’s haughty eye

*Perceive or even vaguely guess
At what is glowing secretly
Beneath your humble nakedness.*

*With heavy cross and features grave
Throughout the land the Son of God
Walked in the habit of a slave
And blest the earth on which he trod.*

That was all that was left of the splendid Russian optimism at the beginning of the 20th century—naivety and a touching tenderness. For only someone of unlimited naivety could fail to understand what it was that was “glowing secretly.” People of a more practical turn of mind chuckled: the Russian people were well robbed, and their optimism was such that they did not even object to it. Not until 1917 did this popular optimism reveal itself to be something much more powerful and much less inoffensive. Without any reliance on “maybe” or “somehow or other,” but with extraordinary thoroughness and in a really practical way, the Russian people swept away the old-fashioned aesthetes “beyond the Black Sea” and made room for a new aesthetics and a new optimism. It may be that in Western Europe there are people who till this day cannot understand what was the source of our single-mindedness and the confidence that marked our deeds. The Soviet man revealed himself not only in the eagerness of his blazing eyes and in the explosive power of his will but also in persevering, strenuous, everyday work, that work that goes on unseen and demands no special qualifications, when the future begins to be perceptible in the most subtle and delicate happenings, so delicate that they can be seen only by one who stands at their source and never takes his mind or eyes off them. At the end of many days and nights, after the most disastrous setbacks and interruptions, after despair and human frailty comes the day of celebration. Then one begins to see, not little details and parts, but whole constructions, spans of noble buildings which had hitherto existed only in the most wildly optimistic dreams. On this glorious day it is the triumph of logic that provides the greatest thrill; one has the impression that things could not have turned out any other way, that all plans laid in advance had been calculated with precision, founded on knowledge, on the appreciation of real values. And then one sees that it was not optimism at all, but realistic conviction, only called optimism because people were once too shy to give it its real name.

Zakharov was one of those who took this difficult path, the path of the optimist. The new was coming to life in the dense extract of the old; the old misfortunes, hunger, envy, anger—human narrowness and petty-mindedness and, still more dangerous, old desires, old habits, old conceptions of happiness. The past revealed itself in many ways, it had no intention of fading quietly away, it puffed itself up and barred the path, disguised itself with new clothes and new forms of speech, clung to one’s feet and hands, delivered speeches and created laws of education. The past was even capable of writing articles that came out in defence of “Soviet pedagogical science.”

There was a time when these representatives of the past used the most up-to-date approach to ridicule and sneer at Zakharov's work, demanding miracles and superhuman feats from him. They set him fantastically stupid puzzles, formulated in brand new scientific terms, and when he was by no means fantastically exhausted by them, pointed at him and shrieked: "He's a failure."

But during the course of all these misunderstandings, the years went by and the new made its appearance in many ways that were well worth thinking about. The colony gained ideas, requirements, standards of measurement from all sides, from everything that happened in the land, every line printed, from the marvellous growth of the Soviet Union as a whole, and from each living Soviet man. Yes, everything had to be given a different name and redefined. Tens and hundreds of boys and girls ceased to be wild little brutes or mere biological specimens. Zakharov now knew their strength and was able to confront them fearlessly with the great political demand summed up in the words: "Be real people!"

They responded to this demand with their generous young talents, well aware that it manifested more respect and confidence in them than any "pedagogical approach." The new science of pedagogy was not born in the painful convulsions of abstract thought, but in the vital actions of people within a real collective, with its traditions and reactions, in new forms of friendship and discipline. This science was coming into existence throughout the Soviet Union, though not everywhere was there sufficient patience and perseverance for its fruits to be gathered.

The old ways clung on tenaciously to their foothold, and Zakharov himself had from time to time to get rid of outworn prejudices. It was only quite recently that he had freed himself of his own principal "pedagogical vice," the postulate that children are no more than objects for education. No, children are living their lives, splendid lives that's why you have to treat them as comrades and citizens, have to respect and keep in view their right to enjoy life and their duty to bear responsibility. After that Zakharov made one further demand on them: no letdowns, not a day of demoralization, not a moment of despair. They met his stern look with smiles: demoralization was not in their programme, either.

Then came the years when Zakharov had no longer any reason for apprehension, for waking up in the mornings with a 'sense of alarm. There was an atmosphere of tense effort about the colony life, but through its veins pulsed the new blood of socialism, which has the power of killing noxious germs of the past as soon as they are born.

The colony ceased to be afraid of its new members, and Zakharov stamped out in himself the last remnants of respect for evolutionary change. One summer, he conducted an experiment, being quite confident of its outcome. During the space of two days, he enrolled fifty new children. He simply swept them up at the railway-station, picked them off the roofs of the railway-carriages, and caught them from between goods trains. At first they protested and swore, but a staff specially formed for the purpose, consisting of veteran colonists, kept them in order and established calm while events took their course. The newcomers were classic figures in outsize coats, all, as it seemed, of darkish complexion, and emitting all varieties of the odour of "social decay."

They regarded their immediate future in pessimistic shades, for it was summer, a season when they liked to travel—the only quality they had in common with the British

aristocracy. What happened next Zakharov called the “explosion method” but the colonists defined it as; “Join us, little one!”

The colony had met the newcomers on the station square in the midst of thousands of onlookers. A brilliant parade was mounted, with straight ranks in extended file, rustling banners and a roar of greeting for the “new comrades.” Vaguely pleased and shy, and gripping their helplessly hanging coat-tails with their hands, the newcomers took the place that had been assigned to them between the third and fourth detachments.

The colony marched through the town. The contrast between the familiar background of the First of May colonists and the new arrivals made a deep impression both on themselves and on everybody around. Women and journalists watched from the pavements with tears in their eyes.

Once home, after they had been bathed, had their heads cropped and been put into uniform, the new boys, their cheeks aflame with the embarrassment that all this attention and exaggeratedly nagging discipline had stirred in the depths of their young souls, were subjected to yet another “explosion.” On the asphalted strip ‘among the flowers all their “travelling suits” were heaped into a big pile. Paraffin was poured over it and the rags became a raging smoky bonfire to which Misha Gontar was to come later with a broom and bucket to dispose of the oily shaggy-looking ashes.

“There go all your autobiographies!” he said to the nearest new boy with a sly wink.

The old colonists laughed heartily at Gontar’s pawky humour while the newcomers looked about them guiltily. It was a somewhat awkward moment.

After this ceremony of the flames the days took their normal course; there were happenings to suit all tastes but hardly a trace of the notorious re-education process; the newcomers gave no trouble either to the collective or to Zakharov.

He understood that the sound life of a children’s collective is logically and inevitably part and parcel of Soviet reality. But there were others to whom it did not appear to be quite so logical. Now Zakharov could affirm that the education of the new man was a happy task within the scope of pedagogical science. Further he maintained that the “spoiled child” is a fetish created by teachers who are not up to their jobs. Altogether, there were many things he could affirm now, and this, above all irritated the partisans of the past.

The past has a dreadful tenacity for life. It finds its way through all kinds of chinks in our lives, and often peeps out of those chinks so cunningly that it quite escapes notice. There is not a single situation to which it cannot adapt itself. One would have thought there was nothing more sacred than the joyous lives of growing-children. All profess to that belief, all defend that principle, and yet....

A man arrives at the colony. He walks around, looks about him, takes a note-book from his pocket and, before he has put one question, his eyes are already moist in anticipation of impending romantic experiences.

“Well, how are things?”

“What do you want to know?”

“How—er—well—er—how are you managing them?”

“Not so bad... we manage all right.”

“Well—er—say you give me some example or other—of your—er—well, you know—more difficult cases.”

Zakharov fumbles for a cigarette in some concern.

“Why do you want it for?”

“Oh, it’s most important, most important. We understand the re-education ‘process, of course—the children are reformed now, but—I can imagine how much difficulty you must have had!”

“Re-education....”

“Yes, that’s it. Let me have some outstanding example, please. Perhaps you’ve got a photograph. What a pity you haven’t any here who haven’t yet been—er ...re-educated.”

Zakharov searched his memory. There had been something very long ago on the lines of—re-education. He glances at this inquisitive romantic and wonders how he can best get rid of him: by proving to him that the re-education process is quite unnecessary or simply by making up a story to tell him. The second way is certainly the easier.

This sort of misunderstanding was a real tragedy for Zakharov. It was even worse when his friends from the Commissariat of Public Education visited him.

They looked at the people, at the machinery, at the flower-beds, they examined figures and reports. They peered politely at the live exhibits and muttered compliments as they turned over files. By their faces Zakharov saw that they simply did not believe a thing. “They’re waifs, aren’t they?”

“No, they’re colonists.”

On the bench Begunok chuckled to himself.

“Take this boy, for example. Was he a waif?”

Volodya stood up and cast a cryptic, friendly look at Zakharov.

“I’m a colonist in the fourth detachment,” he said.

“But before that, you were a street-waif, weren’t you?”

For some reason Begunok could not help laughing-All the same, he felt that some reply was called for.

“I’ve—er—forgotten.”

“What do you mean, you’ve forgotten? Do you mean to say you’ve forgotten that you were once a waif?”

“Uh-huh...”

“That’s quite impossible!”

“Word of honour, I have!”

Although Volodya spoke with sincere conviction, his examiners felt that the lad was pulling their legs, and this seemed a reasonable assumption in view off the fact that everybody here appeared to be playing a game with secret rules.

The friends left feeling upset. They did not often find such complete solidarity among conspirators. It made it quite impossible to distinguish between truth and deception. In any case it looked as if things were going too well.

“It’s impossible!”

“And even if you accept it as true, where’s the struggle? Where does scientific pedagogy come into it? And, finally, where are the waifs? Where could they have picked up those children?”

People of that sort have never been optimists.

2

Vanya

Only a month had passed since the Commanders’ Council, a day that Vanya would remember all his life. June, hot and sunny, reigned over the colony. Vanya’s school uniform lay in his locker. The commander of the fourth detachment did not allow anyone to wear school uniform.

“It’s just the time for you to go about in shorts, lads,” he said, “like taking a sunbath...?”

So Vanya and the rest of them went in shorts and singlets, to which they added, for ceremonial occasions, loose-fitting perfectly ironed sail-cloth tunics, all spick and span with sleeves, a collar and a breast-pocket. On those occasions they wore blue socks, running-shoes and gold skull-caps. The boys looked splendid in this attire.

Vanya fell quickly into the ways of the colony, where he liked everything and felt well within his depth. He turned down his lawful right to two days’ rest, and started working in the foundry as a core-maker. The foundry was situated in an old stone shed. At one end stood the furnace, at the other the core-makers worked. Their job was to cast copper oil-cans. Vanya liked to hear them described with the important-sounding name of “Stauffer oil-cans.” He was pleased that these Stauffers were in great demand at various factories—without them not a single machine could run: that, at least, was what the whole of the fourth detachment asserted. Vanya made it a point to watch full cart-loads of small cases being sent off to the railway station. The cases held oil-cans, nickel-plated highly finished, and wrapped in paper.

The cans were of different sizes, ranging from 20 to 80 mm. in diameter, the mould cores being of similar dimensions. Vanya got into the swing of things from the very first day, though, naturally, it took him some time to learn the knack. There were times when the core would collapse in his hands as he pierced its sandy body with a piece of thin wire to lay it beside the others on a piece of plywood, ready for sending to the dryer. But within a week he had learned how to use the mallet so as to make a core of the required compactness, to damp down the sand to the necessary degree of moisture, to extract the cores from the moulds with care and pierce them with wire, and, though he was not yet managing to handle a hundred cores every four hours, he could do an easy sixty,... Blum paid the boys a kopek a core—a very poor rate according to Shary, Novak and Petka Kravchuk.

But other things besides mould cores engaged Vanya's interest. Every day he would stop, a little breathless from the effect of new impressions, look at his new friends, and press them for explanations.

Take the band, for example. All the little chaps in the fourth detachment worshipped the band. They were fur of talk about it. They could hum the tunes of the "Marche Militaire" and the march from *Carmen*, and sang "The Changing of the Guard" to words of their own. After this came a very fine and complicated piece of um-ta-ta. But the real secrets of the band were shared by a few: Begunok, who played second trumpet, Petka Kravchuk, on the piccolo, and Filka Shary, who outshone them at first cornet. Vanya was keen to play an instrument, too, but had to wait until he got the title of colonist, mere charges not being eligible. While waiting for that happy event Vanya did not miss a single rehearsal. No sooner did he hear the call for the band to assemble than he was the first to enter the class-room where it usually met. On the first few days the band-monitors tried to turn him out, but then they grew accustomed to his presence and already put Vanya Galchenko down as a future musician. Vanya found everything to his liking in the band: the gleaming white chorus of instruments—silver-plated, Volodya Begunok maintained—thirty pieces in all, the eight black clarinets, the cunning curves of the trombones, the music stands and the strict manner of the stout merry old conductor, Victor Denisovich, famous for his caustic remarks.

"Have you ever been to the circus?" the conductor once asked the crack bassoonist Danilo Gorovoy, after the usual mistake over bottom C.

"Yes," Gorovoy replied with flaming cheeks.

"Well, you must have seen how the sea lion plays the trumpet."

Gorovoy, a massive thick-necked fellow who was the colony's famed blacksmith, licked the huge mouthpiece of his bassoon in silence. Victor Denisovich cast him a baleful glance; raising their heads from their instruments, all the forty musicians looked at him too.

"Well, it's only a sea lion after all. And how well he does it!" the conductor continued.

Gorovoy looked at Victor Denisovich with mortification. He was known throughout the colony as a fellow lacking in wit, but this was an occasion when he could not possibly accept in silence the insulting reference to the sea lion. After all, a sea lion hadn't even legs, while its-head was like a dog's. Gorovoy shifted his eyes from the conductor's face with obvious disrespect and in a, low voice, said:

"What's so wonderful about his performance?"

This set everybody laughing heartily—the musicians, Victor Denisovich, Vanya Galchenko and even Gorovoy himself. A voice was heard above the laughter adding: "The sea lion would 'also muff bottom C, Victor Denisovich!"

But the conductor had grown serious again. He-gazed frigidly over the heads off the band players and tapped the music-stand with his slender baton.

"Fourth number. Keep it down, trombones! One... two!"

Vanya held his breath beside the kettle-drum as the splendid, rich -music poured into his ears. But the band attracted him for other than musical reasons too. It was said in the colony that the band had not once been in trouble at a general meeting during its five

years of existence. Its senior member was Jean Griffé, a tall dark-eyed youth in the ninth detachment. Vanya hardly dared to look at him, and as for speaking to him.... The only time he looked in his direction was when Griffé was playing solo on his short cornet, for then his attention was entirely engrossed in the music before him and on the beat of the conductor's baton.

Yet Vanya had time for other things than the band-He was enthralled by the sports-ground, too. He looked with no less respect on Perlov whose head was usually swathed triumphantly in bandages; he had a glorious renown as a dashing forward. With bated breath Vanya listened to tales of stirring volley-ball matches. Illustrious, too, were the gorodki players. Their captain, Kruksov, said of them:

"In our team we knock out the 'letter' with one throw."

"Hot! That's impossible!"

"I tell you we do. What do you mean 'impossible'? "We can do it with 'aeroplane,' too, of course. Our lads don't throw hard but when they toss the stick both ends do their job."

On the wall in the main building passage hung a puzzle-board. Vanya spent much time in front of it, reading its hundreds of amazing questions, pictures, puzzles, drawings, very difficult mathematical formulas. One of them showed a window with a girl looking out of it. Underneath ran the question: "How old is this girl?"

Then there was another question: where can a cottage like this be built *so* that all four walls face south? Next to it was a picture of a pretty little cottage with a flag flying on it.

Behind Vanya stands Gaidovsky. He is a serious sort.

"That's the fifth in the series. Just for decoration now. All the questions have been answered and the prizes awarded. In the autumn, Pyotr Vasilyevich will put up another one. I scored four thousand points on the puzzle-board last winter,"

Vanya became acquainted with Pyotr Vasilyevich. He had the odd surname of Malenky (*A Russian game like skittles in which the pins are arranged in a series of combinations, among them "letter," "aeroplane," etc. A stick is thrown at them.*) but in reality he was a giant, the tallest in the colony and terribly thin. His legs were thin, his neck was thin, his nose was thin, yet he was a gay, tireless fellow. The chief thing about him was that he was a "queer fish" as the boys put it. They had many funny stories to tell about him, but at the same time they flocked around him, possessed by the most complicated plans and schemes and undertakings, in which they let him take the lead.

Malenky (small) it appeared, had sharp eyes. He picked out Vanya the day after his arrival, calling to him as he was crossing the yard at a run.

"Hey, you there!"

Vanya slowed down.

"Come here!"

"What do you want?"

Malenky had such long legs that three strides were enough to bring him beside Vanya.

"New boy?"

Vanya saw a thin long-nosed face looking down at him from aloft, from the very sky. Below the nose grew something like a moustache with a rather artificial look. The eyes were bright blue and pressing.

"You're new, aren't you? What's your name? Vanya Galchenko? Do you know how to make a seine net?"

"Seine?" echoed Vanya.

"Yes, for catching fish. You don't! What about wireless sets? You can't, do that, either! Perhaps you're a poet! Well, what can you do?"

This torrent of questions threw Vanya into confusion, but he did not intend to grovel and replied, with his head high and one eye screwed up:

"I once made a stand."

"What kind of stand?"

"A shoeblack's stand...."

"You made it yourself?"

"Yes."

"And you cleaned shoes?"

"Yes, I did."

"With brushes?"

"Uh-huh, the little one first, then the big one."

"You see! We can get it running with you."

"Who?"

"You don't grasp what I mean. I'm talking about getting our rowing-car running. So it's Vanya Galchenko? You must be a practical man, I think."

Without another word, Malenky took several strides to the side and disappeared between the two buildings. He dealt with the obstacle of the flower-beds by simply stepping over them.

That sounded interesting. A rowing-car! Vanya asked everybody in the fourth detachment about it but no one had ever heard of the rowing-car. The rumour that Pyotr Vasilyevich Malenky was planning to get Vanya to help him construct such a thing caused considerable agitation in the fourth detachment. It turned out that its members had their own plans with Malenky: on Sunday he was going to take one of them fishing in a mysterious lake about ten kilometres away, with another he was going to launch a complicated game, while he had arranged with a third to borrow the Commanders' Council room and fix something up in it.

"Who on earth is he?" asked Vanya.

"Pyotr Vasilyevich? Well, he's—er—he's really nothing at all."

"What do you mean, nothing?"

"He's considered as a teacher because he teaches the top form drawing, but really he's just nothing— he's just by himself...."

A week later Vanya met Malenky in the woods. He was wandering among the trees, gazing up at their tops. He recognized Vanya at once.

“Ah, Vanya!” he cried. “That rowing-car’s a wonderful idea. We’ll get together tomorrow and talk it over.”

But the next day Malenky fell ill and it was said that he had contracted tuberculosis. The news was passed from mouth to mouth in the fourth detachment with deep sorrow. Vanya thought not so much about the mysterious rowing-car as about Malenky himself; such a tall, clever, interesting chap to be taken ill with that wretched disease, a mysterious sort of illness, too, and said to be fatal....

But, to tell the truth, what Vanya liked best of all was the life in the fourth detachment. It was so warm and friendly, the boys were all so interesting, and Zyriansky ran everything so strictly. Every day, Vanya was eager to finish his work as soon as possible so as to return to the clean cosy dormitory, to listen, to talk, to laugh, to live.... He’d love Zyriansky to order him to do something, even something really difficult, so that he could salute and reply:

“Very good, Comrade Commander!”

3

Old and New Accounts

Day after day Igor Chernyavin turned up for work and rubbed down chair-struts. His hands were covered with blisters and scratches, and he had lost none of his aversion towards the rasp. Igor did not conceal his dislike of the work on the struts, but he considered himself bound to carry on with it since he had given his word of honour to the Commanders’ Council. He did, however, conceal his panicky fear of bees and flies, though he kept an attentive eye on them when they flew around his bench. Fortunately, one week after Igor started work, the assembly-shop moved into the building known as the stadium. Poorly as the work on the struts proceeded, Igor was able to turn over to Shteval thirty pieces at the end of each four-hour work-day, on which basis his daily wage was reckoned at ninety kopeks. Shteval kept saying that a fellow like Igor ought to be handling at least a hundred struts a day.

This work took up only four hours in the afternoon. The remainder of the day was passed in far more pleasant ways. During the morning, Igor went to the school-building, where Nikolai Ivanovich spent half an hour or an hour working with him in one of the classrooms. Nikolai Ivanovich was always as neatly dressed, highly polite and frank, as on the first occasion they met. Since then Igor had grown to know the other men and women teachers, and had noticed that they were all distinguished by their clean turn-out and impeccably good manners. Generally speaking, the teachers in this place were “somehow different”; indeed, the whole school, in a building of its own, had a pleasant atmosphere—something respectable, clean, inviting, solemn, he would even say.

Igor liked the library, too. It was next to the Quiet Room. Books there were in plenty, all of them bound and arranged tidily on the shelves from the floor to the ceiling. There was always a queue of borrowers at the counter spanning the wide door-way. An old lady, quite an ancient, called Yevgenia Fyodorovna, was in charge of the library, but it

was three colonists who busied themselves with the books, issuing and receiving them, registering them, marking them, putting signs and smudges on the “recommended” lists. The chief of them was Shura Myatnikova, a slim shapely girl with a dark complexion and a large mouth.

“Did you read it or just look at the pictures?” she would ask with an interplay of humour and gravity in her eyes.

Igor had always been fond of reading. His days of roving had made him lose touch with books and now he flung himself into reading with a new zest. It was pleasant to wake up in the morning and recall that there was a book in his locker. Nesterenko did not permit late reading in the evening and switched off the light at eleven o’clock. Igor trained himself to wake up before the call for getting up so as to have an hour’s reading in bed.

It was this way that there began a day, which, right up to the evening, was packed with most notable events.

Nesterenko had announced to him the evening before that he was to serve as detachment monitor the next day.

It was the monitor’s duty to be up at six so as to be able to finish tidying-up before the inspection. Igor awoke early but though he remembered that there was a copy of *The Mysterious Island* lying in his locker, he forgot about his monitoring duties. When the bugle-call sounded and the whole detachment sprang out of bed, Nesterenko could only exclaim with a sigh:

“What are you letting me in for?”

Igor rushed for the dusters and brushes, but it was too late. The inspection team found the dormitory in disorder with Chernyavin in the midst of his chars. What made it worse was that Zakharov himself conducted the inspection. He frowned severely, cast a chilling look around the dormitory, said, icily: “Good morning, Comrades,” heard the report without paying attention and asked:

“Who is the monitor on duty?” “I am,” said Igor with a sheepish smile. “Take one punishment task.”

Igor smiled again in the same way. Then he heard Nesterenko hiss.

“Reply correctly! What’s the matter with you?” Igor gladly snatched at a chance to relieve the painful situation.

“Very good, Comrade Director!” he rapped out springing to attention.

Long after the inspection, Nesterenko went on lecturing Igor, fussing like an old dame as he expatiated about the blemishes on his character and his aristocratic upbringing.

“Even books, even such sacred things like books make you go wrong. God only knows what’ll become of you if you run into some real rotter!”

The rest of his comrades, however, did not blame Igor severely. Zorin even approved.

“It’s not a bad thing, Nesterenko. What are you scared about? It’s his baptism of fire! Just ask yourself: what sort of fellow will he be if he never gets one punishment task.”

“That’s true, of course, but it’s not a good thing for the detachment,” Nesterenko admitted with a smile.

Vanya Galchenko also happened to be a detachment monitor that day. For him, things went much more satisfactorily and even had their moments of glory. While all slept, he was up on the window-sill, whistling faintly as he washed the panes. Outside, the morning was growing apace, down below, someone was busy watering the flower-beds, the windows of the school house opposite glowed with the reflected sunlight. Volodya Begunok had long since grabbed his bugle and gone off to wake up commander on duty Rudnev of the tenth detachment. Soon afterwards his reveille sounded in the yard.

Continuing his work, Vanya stole a sly glance at his slumbering comrades. In response to the bugle-call, Shary muttered something in his sleep. Steps sounded below the window.

“Are they still asleep?” Volodya enquired, softly, from the garden.

Vanya nodded.

A moment later the door swung quietly open and through it appeared the end of the bugle. The blast that followed sounded shatteringly loud. Zyriansky was out of his bed in two shakes, but Volodya had already vanished.

“The little devil! I’ll catch him though! Good for you, Vanya, you’ve even washed the windows.”

Vanya, crimson with satisfaction at earning his commander’s praise, went on polishing the glass still more vigorously. Once again the silver bugle was thrust through the door. Zydansky sprang to life and moved stealthily towards the door, but it was suddenly flung open. Begunok pounced on Zyriansky, flung his arms, legs and even the bugle around his belly and gripped him tight.

“Come on, you chaps, let’s beat up the commander!”

Out of their beds sprang Shary, Kravchuk and both the Semyons. A general scrimmage began. From his place on the window-sill, Vanya watched in fits of laughter. A short sturdily-built handsome boy glanced into the room. It was Rudnev, the commander on duty.

“Getting up?” he enquired with a smile.

After breakfast, Igor caught sight of Vanya.

“How are things going, Vanya?”

“Oh, fine! I’m going to get thanked in the order of the day!”

“You don’t mean to say! What for?”

“For my monitoring.”

“For monitoring? The hell you are! Well, I’ve got a mention too!”

“Thanks, too?”

“No, one punishment task. You know, they say you can’t be a good colonist unless you’ve had a punishment task.”

“Who told you that?”

“That’s what Sancho Zorin says. He’s in charge of me.”

“He’s a queer sort off fellow to be in charge of you! Now mine really knows his job. I’ve got Volodya!”

During the summer, the school did not work and the park was crowded. Some people made their way to the pond, some to the sports-grounds, while, others made themselves comfortable on the benches and read books. Igor took the book which had started that morning’s scandal .and went to the most remote and shady spot.

As he walked along the unweeded path he met for the third time in his life that “lovely” girl with the dark eyes. She was in a great hurry as she came his way, her sunburnt feet moving quickly, her hair still damp after the bathe. The girl raised her eyes towards Igor, and he saw they were no less lovely than before, with the flecks of gold in the blue, only this time there was no embarrassment in her look. She seemed to remember something and smiled cheekily.

Igor blocked her path. She ‘took a step back and raised her hand to her face.

“Don’t be alarmed. Mam’selle, please don’t. But do tell me your name.”

“What for?”

“I want to get to know you. My name’s Igor.”

“Well?”

“Quite an ordinary name, of course. Just Igor.”

The girl tried to slip past him. She was wearing a shabby skirt.

“Just tell me your name, that’s all I ask for.”

The girl stopped and placed her little fist against her lips.

“You’re afraid of flies, aren’t you?”

Suddenly remembering the unhappy circumstances in which he had met the girl the last time, Igor blushed. She noticed his confusion, dropped her hand, and walked on. Igor made way for her. She turned to him and, with a brilliant smile, said: “My name’s Oksana!”

Igor threw up his arms. “Oksana! My God, what a name!”

But the girl was already far away, her legs flashing, brightly as she went along the neglected path.

“What’s wrong with you?” a voice called to Igor from behind.

Igor turned. It was Vsevolod Seredin. Son of an old engineer, he tried to preserve a touch of the “intellectual” in his bearing in the colony, keeping lips that naturally tended to smile pursed tightly and holding his head tilted ‘unusually high.

“Do you happen to know who that girl is?” asked Igor. “She’s a colonist, isn’t she?”

“Of course she’s not,” replied Seredin, rather heatedly, “she’s a servant-girl!”

“Impossible!”

“Why not?”

“You mean to say she’s a servant?”

“Exactly. She works in a summer villa beyond the pond. Quite an ordinary house, really.”

“And she works for the owner of it?”

“He doesn’t own it. Nobody knows who the devil he is. Some sort of lawyer.”

“Where did you hear this?”

“You ask Gontar about her. He’s in love with her.”

“In love? Not really?”

“I should say so! It’s because of her that he combs his hair. He’ll break your ribs if...”

Igor laid a hand on Seredin’s arm.

“I’m not worrying about my ribs, sir! What’s worrying me, you see, is why she’s so shabbily dressed if he’s & lawyer.”

“I can’t say. Gontar thinks he employs her to look after the garden. He grows his own vegetables, you see, but he doesn’t do any work himself, he just exploits her. Oksana does the work. Like a farm-hand. And she’s only fifteen. He’s a lousy swine.”

Seredin threw a calm look of understanding at Igor; “lousy swine” sounded particularly juicy in his refined pronunciation.

They set off for the main building. Igor wanted to pump Seredin some more about Oksana. Commander on duty Rudnev stood in the porch with a note-hook in his hand. Catching sight of Igor he said:

“You have one punishment task to work off. This path needs to be swept and sanded. There’s half an hour’s work in it, just for one punishment task. Report to me at dinner-time.”

“Very good, Comrade Commander on duty,” Igor rapped out, remembering to spring to attention.

He forgot, however, to ask what he ought to sweep the path with and where the sand was to be taken from. Rudnev had left. Igor looked around him. Seredin, too, was nowhere to be seen.

Igor worked for half an hour on the path. He had three meagre twigs in his hand and despite all his efforts he could not sweep the path clean of its small weeds,

“Are you on a punishment task?” Nesterenko asked as he passed by.

“Yes.”

“Who on earth would think of using twigs like that?” Nesterenko went on with a scornful pout.

“What else is there to use?”

“Make a besom, of course, you ass!”

Nesterenko threw another glance at Igor without adding a word, shrugged his shoulders disapprovingly, and went away. Crimson in the face, Igor looked towards Vanya, who had popped up from somewhere but Vanya was already off.

Igor stood thinking. Then he scratched the ground once or twice again. Really, he had nothing against doing a punishment task, but at least would somebody provide him with

implements! On the path lay a number of sprigs, a few cigarette-ends and some petals, all of which put up strong resistance to his twigs. Once more Igor looked around in helplessness and caught sight of Vanya bounding towards him with a magnificent besom in his hand.

“Oh, Vanya, you’re a sport! Where did you find it?”

“I cut it myself. There’s plenty more to be had over there!”

“Hand over.”

“All right. You go on sweeping while I go for the sand.”

Twenty minutes later Igor and Vanya were finishing-off the job by scattering sand from the same bucket. Zakharov came round the corner of the house,

“Giving him a hand, Galchenko?”

“Well, just a bit. He really did it all himself...”

“I see you’re a good comrade!”

Vanya raised his head but Zakharov had already passed on. He had on a fine well-polished pair of boots and a close-fitting tunic..

“There’s a new boy being brought,” Igor said.

Vanya took a look down the road and saw it was so. One of the pair was a militiaman.

“I came that way too. It’s not good to be brought by a militiaman.”

Vanya did not reply; he was examining the results of their work with a business-like eye.

“There’s a bare patch over there, we need more sand on it.”

“And where shall we put the rest?”

“Let’s clear this other path. It’s only a small one.”

Igor raised no objections. In ten minutes they had tidied up the short side-path. Igor carried the bucket towards the main entrance where commander on duty Rudnev was just signing the militiaman’s note-book. By the time the two friends reached him, the militiaman had already saluted and set off back to town.

“I’ve finished my punishment task, Comrade Commander on duty.”

“I’ll have a look at it in a moment, after I’ve turned this fellow over to Torsky.”

Igor turned his eyes towards the newcomer and was struck numb. Before him stood Grisha Ryzhikov. As for Vanya Galchenko, he was quite bowled over with the shock and stood there with his mouth wide open. Ryzhikov was smiling jauntily, but he could not make up his mind to say anything.

“Is that viper coming to the colony?” Igor blurted. “Just watch me wipe him off the face of the earth!”

Rudnev raised an arm to stop him,” but Igor managed to get a grip on Ryzhikov’s collar.

“Daring to rob a kid like Vanya!”

“Let go,” shrieked Ryzhikov, clutching at Igor’s hand with his grimy fingers.

Igor already had his free hand clenched over Ryzhikov's head but then Rudnev grasped Igor firmly by the belt and pulled him back.

"Order, Comrade Chernyavin!"

Igor could not resist turning round at these shouted words. His eyes at once fell on Rudnev's white collar and on the gold and silver badge and bright silk arm band. He released Ryzhikov and sprang to attention.

Rudnev glanced at Ryzhikov with what Igor took to be a look of disgust, but the words he addressed to Igor were stern and imperative.

"It's forbidden to settle old accounts in the colony, Comrade Chernyavin!" he said quietly.

There was 'something Igor found quite irresistible in the tone of Rudnev's voice, in his firm gaze and the peremptory way he contracted his eyebrows, and in the respect with which he pronounced the word "Comrade-" Igor saluted.

"Very good, Comrade Commander on duty," he exclaimed.

Rudnev was already on his way to the house with Ryzhikov. It took Igor some time to pull himself together, though Ryzhikov was out of his 'mind now: it had only just been brought home to him how extraordinary it was that he had given in so readily to that little Rudnev. . . .

Vanya emerged from his stupor and stirred beside him. . . .

4

Friends for Life

Vanya caught sight of Volodya Begunok at the other end of the yard and ran up to him to share his misfortune. Ryzhikov's arrival had, as it were, eclipsed the sun shining above the colony. Baleful shadows lay now over all its buildings, over the woods and the pond, even over the fourth detachment. Ryzhikov in the colony! It was outrageous.

Begunok's brow grew furrowed; his eyes took on a tense look, as, with his legs planted apart, he listened patiently to Vanya's disturbing story.

"You mean it's the same fellow who robbed you? I don't understand why you've got into such a funk, though!"

"But he's in the colony now! He'll pinch everything!"

"Huh!" Begunok exclaimed, pointing a finger at Vanya. "That's what's scared you! You think he'll steal?" It's not so easy to do that as you think! Just let him try! Do you imagine we didn't have lots like him? Why, we've had simply terrible sorts come here."

"What's happened to them?"

"What do you mean? They're still here, but they're different from what they used to be like."

They walked to the park. Neither they nor Igor Chernyavin noticed a car drive up to the main building. Two women got out of it. Wanda Stadnitskaya was with them. Commander on duty Rudnev ran out to meet them took a quick look at Wanda and saw how beautiful she was. Her hair was now quite fair and clean; it even glittered. Over it

she wore a blue beret. Her squelching galoshes were replaced by black shoes and stockings. Wanda's face now wore a lively expression as she glanced at her travelling-companions! She met the bright official manner of the commander on duty with a friendly smile.

Rudnev, unfortunately, could not, on that occasion, return her smile. He raised his arm and enquired with courteous, albeit alert, politeness:

"Please tell me what you want. I am the colony commander on duty."

A stout woman with dimples in her cheeks and dark fluffy eyebrows—obviously a gay, kind-hearted sort—was so lost in admiration of the attractive

Rudnev that she did not immediately answer. She laughed.

"Ah, so that's what you are! Commander on duty! Well, we want the Principal."

"The Director?"

"All right, if that's how he is called."

"What is your business, please?"

"Just think of that!" the woman said, turning to her companion, who was quite as plump, but with a more sedate and even slightly severe air. "Do we have to tell you?"

"Yes," replied Rudnev.

"All right, then. We've brought you this girl. Here she is... Wanda Stadnitskaya. We ourselves are from the Party committee of the Comintern factory. We have a letter, too."

Rudnev showed them the way in. "This way, please."

The sentry at the door, thin fair-haired Semyon Kasatkin, conveyed a question to Rudnev with an almost imperceptible glance, and received his answer in a similar all-but-intangible way.

Rudnev opened the door to the Commanders' Council room, then stepped aside to let the others out. Wanda raised her eyes, then suddenly growing pale, uttered a faint scream and fell on the window-sill.

Ryzhikov, an insolent grin on his face, walked past her.

"You wait here, I'll be back right away," Rudnev said to him. Then he turned to the newcomers. "Please go in. These people want Alexei Stepanovich, Vitya." They all turned to Wanda and invited her to enter the room, but the girl hung her head and said: "I'm not going anywhere."

Ryzhikov was standing ready to leave, his hands in his pockets and a look of strange mockery in his face. Torsky's experienced eyes summed up the situation.

"Take him away, Rudnev."

Grasping Ryzhikov by the arm, Rudnev turned him round to face the exit.

"Come in," Torsky continued.

"I'm not going anywhere," Wanda replied, her head hanging still lower. When Ryzhikov had disappeared from sight into the vestibule, she threw after him a look of hatred; then she turned away to the open window and burst into tears.

The two women exchanged distracted glances. Torsky gently pushed them forward into the room.

“Sit down here while I have a word with her.”

They went ahead obediently. Torsky closed the door behind them, took Wanda gingerly by the shoulder and looked into her eyes.

“Why are you afraid of that ginger-headed fellow? Do you know him?”

Wanda did not reply, but stopped crying. She had no handkerchief and wiped her tears away on her sleeve.

“Don’t be silly! If you’re going to let young bucks like that scare you, there’s no point in living at all.”

“I’m not afraid of him, but all the same, I’m not going to stay here,” said Wanda, looking towards the corner of the window frame.

“Very well. Don’t stay, then. Your car’s waiting. But you might at least go into the room.”

“Where to?”

“Just come and join us in here.”

Wanda was silent for a while, heaved a sigh, and, without another word, walked towards the door. She wanted to pause a little in the Commanders’ Council room, but Torsky led her straight into Zakharov’s office.

Zakharov looked at Wanda with surprise and she started back with a cry.

“Where have you brought me?”

“There are some women out there, a couple of them. Talk to them, Alexei Stepanovich.”

Zakharov hurried from the room, followed by Wanda’s alarmed look. Then Wanda dropped on to the broad settee. Now she was talking and crying at the same time.

“Where have you brought me? All the same I won’t stay. I don’t want to live here.”

Twice she flung herself towards the door, but the silent Torsky barred her way, and she did not go so far as to push him aside. Then she went on crying softly on the settee. Through the window, Torsky saw the car leave for the city. Only then did he speak.

“There’s no point in crying. Everything’s going to be fine now.”

Wanda grew calmer and began to dry her tears, but when Zakharov came in she started sobbing again. Then she jumped up from the settee, snatched off her beret, flung it into a corner, and shrieked: “Soviet power? Where’s the Soviet power here?”

Zakharov, standing behind his desk, said:

“I am the Soviet power.”

Wanda uttered a shriek and craned her neck.

“You?” she screamed. “You are the Soviet power!

Then take a knife and cut my throat! Go on do it! I don’t want to live anyway!”

With steady, unhurried movements Zakharov settled himself at his desk, laid before him the paper concerning Wanda, and began to talk as if he was resuming some long conversation.

“That’s how it is, Wanda, we all are such adepts at empty phrases! I get .into just the same state.... By the way, what a nice beret you’ve got. Pick it up and let me have a look at it.”

Wanda looked at him dully, and sat down again on the settee. It was Torsky who picked up the beret and handed it to Zakharov.

“It’s a nice little beret... Colour’s good. And our people have been searching and searching without finding any. I wonder how much it cost.”

“Four roubles,” Wanda said, sullenly.

“Four? That’s not expensive. A very nice little beret.”

Zakharov was not particularly enthusiastic about the beret though! He spoke dryly, without concealing the fact that the beret was but of a fleeting interest to him. Then he nodded and Torsky left the room. Wanda went on looking in a dejected way somewhere towards the corner between the desk and the wall. Stroking the beret with his hand, Zakharov came over to her. She turned away.

“Look here, Wanda,” he began, “it’s always possible to die; that’s something one can always do. Only you really ought to be polite. Why should you turn your back on me? I haven’t done you any harm. You don’t know me. What if I were a very good man? There are people who say I am.”

Wanda, reluctantly, looked at him askance, while the corner of her mouth dropped in scorn.

“Huh, blowing your own trumpet...”

“And why not? I advise you to do it, too. It’s sometimes very useful to boast about yourself. Though I ought to tell you that there are other people who approve of me, too.”

‘At last Wanda smiled candidly.

“Well, what’s to be done?” she asked.

“I’ll tell you. I suggest that we make friends.”

“Friends? I don’t want any of your friendship! I’ve had enough of making friends, I can tell you.”

“I know the kind of friends you’ve had! I’m offering you something serious: a great friendship that will last a lifetime. A lifetime, do you understand what that means?”

Wanda looked at him steadily.

“I understand.”

“Where are your parents?”

“They—er—went away. To Poland. They were Poles.”

“And you?”

“I got lost... at the station. I was still a kid.”

“So you have no parents!”

“That’s right.”

“Well, so you see. ... I can take the place of your father. And I’ll not lose you, you can be sure. Only, bear this in mind: I shall be such a friend that I won’t hesitate to give it you, if need be. I’m a very strict man. So strict that sometimes I even scare myself. Don’t you feel frightened? I’m not going to favour you just because you happen to be a beautiful girl.”

Wanda’s eyes suddenly filled with tears; she turned away again.

“Beautiful!” she said in a barely audible voice, “You don’t know what kind of person I am yet.”

“Listen, my dear! In the first place, I know everything, and, secondly, there’s nothing to know. It’s all nonsense, really.”

“You’re talking like that on purpose to get me to stay on at the colony, aren’t you?”

“Of course I am! What do you think? I don’t like pointless talk. I always say things on purpose. You’re quite right; I want you to stay in the colony. I want that very much. Frankly, you can’t imagine how much I want it”

She raised eyes that were full of doubt. Fie gazed down on her with a look that showed, quite plainly, that he really meant what he said. She beckoned him to sit on the settee next to her.

“Sit down here. I’ve something to tell you.”

He sat down in silence.

“Do you know what?” she began.

“Take your beret.”

“Do you know what?” she repeated.

“Well, what is it?”

“I really wanted to come to the colony, very much so. But there’s someone here... someone who knows me... He’ll tell everybody about me,”

Zakharov laid his hand on her head and gently stroked her hair.

“I see. That’s nothing to worry about, you know. Let him talk.”

“No!” Wanda groaned.

She cast an appealing look at him. He smiled and shook his head.

“He won’t say a word, not on his life!”

Begunok came rushing into the office, halted dumbfounded in front of them, and fell into confusion.

“Rudnev wants to know whether he has to—er —take charge of the new girl, Alexei Stepanovich.”

“No, he doesn’t have to. Klava will look after her. Now, show your heels, my friend, and please send Klava to me.”

“Very good, Comrade Director!”

Begunok dashed out of the office. Wanda leaned over the side of the settee, crying quietly. Zakharov did not disturb her; he walked up and down the room, looked at the pictures and then once again sat down beside her, and took her damp hand in his.

"Well, you've had your little cry. That's all right, only there's no need to cry any more. What's the name of the colonist who knows you?"

"Ryzhikov!"

"The fellow who came today!"

Back into the room flew Begunok. He stole another quick, interested look at Wanda, though without impairing the efficient air of his report.

"Klava's on her way. She'll be here in a moment."

"Well, Volodya, take a look at our new colonist. She is rather in the dumps. Her name's Wanda Stadnitskaya."

"Wanda Stadnitskaya! Why, that's wonderful!"

"What's wonderful about it?"

"Don't you know? Why, Vanya was going off to the city to look for you, Wanda. I was going, too."

"Vanya? D'you mean Vanya Galchenko's here?" asked Wanda.

"Of course, he is! Oh, he will be glad. I can go for him, can't I?"

"Bring him here at once," Zakharov exclaimed. "And bring Ryzhikov, too."

"I see! Well, in that case, we'll need Chernyavin, too...."

"Do you know Chernyavin, Wanda?" asked Zakharov.

Wanda began to sob bitterly.

"I can't..."

"Nonsense. Call them all here, Volodya."

Begunok bumped into Klava Kashirina at the door.

"Did you send for me, Alexei Stepanovich?" she asked,

"Listen, Klava. This is Wanda Stadnitskaya, a new girl. Enrol her into your detachment and see that she has clothes and a bath and medical examination at once, everything she needs; and see that she doesn't cry any more. We've had enough of that."

Klava leaned over Wanda.

"What are you crying for? Come along with me, Wanda."

Without looking at Zakharov, Wanda hurriedly and unsteadily left the room with Klava.

Ten minutes later Igor, Vanya, and Ryzhikov were standing in 'the office. Torsky and Begunok attended in their official capacities, Zakharov was speaking: "Now, do you understand? Everything that happened in the past is to be forgotten. There's to be no gossip or tale-telling of any sort about Wanda. Are you prepared to give me your promise?"

"Of course!"

Vanya replied with ardour, though he did not understand what sort of gossip he could make up about the girl.

Igor placed his hand over his heart.

“You may count on me, Alexei Stepanovich!”

“And what about you, Ryzhikov?”

“What’s she to me?” Ryzhikov asked.

“Whether she’s anything to you or not, you keep your mouth shut!”

“All right,” agreed Ryzhikov, cryptic, and condescending.

They all looked at him. Scrutinized him, it would be truer to say. Ryzhikov shrugged his shoulders, discontentedly.

In the Commanders’ Council room the conversation on this subject was resumed.

“Listen to me, Ryzhikov!” said Igor Chernyavin as he tapped his finger persistently on Ryzhikov’s chest. “What Zakharov said is one thing, but you’d better write this down in your note-book: one word from you and I’ll tie a stone round your neck and drown you in the pond.”

5

Foundry Fever

Wherever the colonists were to be found—in the dormitories or the dining-hall, in the park, the corridors or the club-rooms—they were always talking production. In most cases it bore the character of captious criticism. There was general agreement that production was badly organized at the colony. At the Commanders’ Council, as at general meetings, they went for production manager Solomon Davidovich Blum and shot questions at him till they had him sweating and pouting his lips.

“Why does the forge smoke?”

“Why are those runners ordered by the Comintern factory lying about without being worked up?”

“Why’s the capstan lathe not in order?”

“Why aren’t there enough cutting-tools?”

“Why does the oil-pipe in the foundry leak?”

“Why are there warps in the casts?”

“What’s the reason for such complete chaos in the machine-shop? There’s rubbish all over the place while Sharikov sits all day in the book-keeper’s office and can’t even manage to reckon up that miserable one thousand oil-cans!”

“When will the pinions be ready for Sadovnichy’s lathe, and the wedges for the tool-rests on Porshnev’s, and the scraper for the front ball-bearing on Yanovsky’s, and what about a general overhaul for Redka’s?”

Although the colonists pressed for repairs to their machines, urging the locksmiths • to carry them out, catching Blum in the yard and complaining to Zakharov, they always regarded the machines themselves with derision.

“You can repair my old hay-cutter a thousand times but, all the same, it’s on its way out. Who would take it for a turning-lathe?”

Blum promised to do everything in the shortest possible time, but as for putting a lathe out of commission to repair it—that he could not do. It would be suicidal to¹ stop a lathe which was still capable of work. It might whistle and creak and baulk while it was running, the colonists might get mad at it but still it worked. The hay-cutters worked, the tool-rests stood firm without wedges, the worn-out ball-bearings functioned. The machine-shop sent crate after crate of finished oil-cans to the storeroom, piles of theatre seats were loaded on drays near the assembly-shop. The dressmaking-shop produced exclusively shorts made of blue, brown or green sateen, but its output ran into thousands, and on each pair the factory made three kopeks. There was no money to be found in the colony but ill poured into its current account at the bank. There were people with initiative in the colony who used to say at the meetings: “Solomon Davidovich has put the money in pickle and it’s no good trying to get any extra work clothes out of him.”

“You seem to think that if you’ve put *a* few kopeks aside, it’s essential to spend them,” Blum would argue patiently. “That’s not the way of thrifty management. I’m not in the least worried about you, dear comrades; you’ll always ‘know how to spend money. You’d get top marks in that, But as for saving it, that’s far from being so easily learned. If you don’t learn to manage now, you’ll find it harder to do so later on. I promised Alexei Stepanovich, and you, too, that we would raise the money to build a new factory, so why all this talk about new overalls? If you manage without them now, you’ll be able to buy yourselves velvet suits and pink bows later.”

These words aroused both laughter and anger. Blum joined in the laughter. All eyes were turned to Zakharov but he only looked back and smiled, not saying a word. It was hard to understand why this man, so demanding and persevering himself, forgave so much in Blum, though, to tell the truth, the colonists themselves were not very hard on Blum, either.

It was in the foundry that conditions were the most shocking. This was a brick shed with a roof that had a good¹ many holes in it. Here stood the foundry-drum. Through an opening in its side was thrown the “raw material”—cartridge-cases of the obsolete type of rifle, bent and green with rust and dirt. Blum raised no objections to any other sort of copper scrap going in. From the same round opening the melted copper was removed by dippers. The drum had an atomizer attached to it, the oil being kept in a tank under the roof in one corner of the shed. All this was long past its first youth and showed many holes and patches of rust.

The combination of drum, atomizer and tank was really very simple, with nothing mysterious about it, but the foundry foreman, Bankovsky, formerly an artisan and owner of the drum, adopted a very mysterious air: he alone knew the secrets of the system.

Work is in full swing in the foundry. The little fellows are busy at the core-makers’ bench. They are all clad in worn-out overalls, which they have obviously inherited -from older members of the colony; the over-loose trousers bag round the boys’ thin legs, the sleeves are too long.

On the foundry floor the mould boxes are arranged, and around them hang the moulders, older colonists like Nesterenko, Sinitsyn and Zyriansky. Against one of the

walls stands' the moulding machine, tended by one of the leading specialists at moulding, the thin serious-looking Kruksov from the seventh detachment.

The foundry is full of smoke. It pours continuously out of the drum, but it can only escape from the shed through holes in the roof. Every day, this kind of exchange takes place between foreman Bankovsky and the colonists:

"It's impossible to work here, Comrade Bankovsky!"

"Why, what's the matter?"

"Look at this smoke! Something's got to be done about it. It's poisonous! Copper fumes!"

"There's nothing at all poisonous about it. I've been working in it all my life."

The smoke, pouring through the holes in the roof, as well as through the doors and windows, drifted all over the colony, and during the casting a sweetish yellow fog hung between the buildings. The young doctor, a former colonist by the name of Nikolai Vershnev with a high forehead and curly hair, ran from office to office, thumping his fist on the tables and waving a volume of the Brockhaus and Ephron Encyclopedia as he poured out threats in his stammering manner:

"I sh-shall g-go to the p-p-procurator. F-f-foundry f-f-fever! D-do you know wh-what that is? Read about it f-f-for yourself!"

Zakharov has known this doctor for a long time. He frowned, removed his pince-nez, and replaced them on his nose.

"I shall have 'to call you to order, Nikolai. The procurator is not going to provide us with a ventilation system. He will merely shut down the foundry."

"L-let him sh-sh-shut it d-down!"

"And where's the money for your dentist's chair going to come from? And the blue lamps you've been giving me no peace about for the past six months? Blue lamps, indeed! Can't you get along without them?"

"Why, every wretched, nut-pa-pa-patient department has a b-b-blue lamp!"

"That means, I suppose, that you can't get along without it?"

"So the b-b-boys will go on b-h-being p-p-poisoned!"

"No, I agree that we need ventilation. I'm pressing for it, and so are you. There's a Komsomol meeting about it today."

At the meeting the doctor sawed the air with his encyclopaedia, interspersing his speech with a terminology that he had mastered anywhere but in the medical institute: "Anyway the shop's a b-b-blinking b-b-bother!"

Other Komsomol members present got worked up and clenched their 'fists. Mark Grinhaus turned his melancholy dark eyes on Slum.

"How can you tolerate such fumes at a time when the whole country is being reconstructed?"

Blum sat on a chair in a corner of the classroom—he couldn't fill his body in behind a desk.

"I don't understand what fumes you're talking about!" he retorted, puffing out his full unmanageable lips in disgust.

"Why, it's filthy! Absolutely not wanted! Rotten for the health!" said Pokhozai, a boy with magnificent dark eyes whose gaiety and wit never deserted him.

Blum placed his elbow on his knee and raised his arm to the meeting in an appeal to their common sense.

"It's a work-shop, after all. If you want to take health-cures then go off to some kind of Crimea, or, say, to Yalta. But this is a factory."

The meeting broke out into general uproar.

"What are you shrieking for? All right, then, we'll put a vent in."

"We ought to charge the Commanders' Council to take the necessary steps about you."

Now it was Slum's turn to grow angry. Hoisting himself up he rose ponderously to his feet, took a pace forward and stood there, red in the face.

"What sort of talk is this, comrades Komsomol members? So you want to put the Commanders' Council on to me, do you? Do you think they can squeeze money out of me, or, maybe, a ventilating system? Was it I who built this rotten factory, or even designed it?"

"You've got the money."

"That's not meant for this. That money's for something quite different."

"You designed the stadium, didn't you?"

"Yes, I did, and what's wrong with that? You're working under its roof, aren't you? You think the way some Komsomol lads go about things is all right, don't you? This one looks at a turning-lathe and says it's a hay-cutter. That one doesn't want to make oil-cans, but wants to go in for some sort of blooming-mill. Life's impossible for him unless we have a blooming-mill!"

"You can't get away from industrialization, Solomon Davidovich!"

"So you think *I* don't know anything about industrialization! So you've found something else to teach me, eh? You know well enough that you've got to earn more money first before we can go in for industrialization. You've got to be right up to here with work!"—Blum raised his hand to his thick neck with some difficulty—"And you would like a fairy godmother to bring you industrialization and ventilation."

"But you'll put in a vent all the same, won't you?"

"I shall."

"You'd better!"

Blum left for the foundry feeling angry and upset. There he came under immediate attack from the core-makers:

"Do you call this an overall?" exclaimed Petka Kravchuk. "Nesterenko used to wear it and now it's been passed on to me. Isn't that so? Look, there's a hole here and another one here!"

Blum raised his hands squeamishly.

“Just fancy that, a little hole here and there! What do you mean waving your sleeves at me like this? Too long, eh? There’s nothing wrong with that! Now, if they’d been too short, that would have been bad. But too long, what’s there to worry about in that? Just roll them up! I’ll show you how to do it!”

“Oh, you’re a cunning fellow, Solomon Davidovich!”

“I’m not cunning at all! You’d do better to tell me how many cores you’ve made!”

“A hundred and twenty-three yesterday.”

“Just think of that! At a kopek each that makes 1 rouble 23 kopeks.”

“Do you call that a fair price? One kopek each! We have to pack the mould and cut the wire and then do-the drying.”

“Well, what do you expect? You’d like me to pay you a kopek for sitting and picking your nose!”

“When shall we get the ventilation, Solomon Davidovich?” asked Nesterenko from the far corner.

“Do you think you’re the only one who wants ventilation? What about me, don’t I need it? Volonchuk will fix it.”

“Volonchuk will, will he? I can imagine what sort of ventilation system he’ll ‘fix up!’”

“You don’t need to imagine anything at all! He’ll do it tomorrow.”

Accompanied by Volonchuk who, though silent and glum, was a jack-of-all-trades, Blum toured the shop several times, taking a good look at the holes in the roof. Volonchuk had no eyes for the roof: “No trouble about putting up a vent, of course, but I’m no roofer,” he observed.

“Comrade Volonchuk! You’re not a roofer and I’m not a roofer, but we’ve got to have a vent.”

Vanya Galchenko worked in the foundry and liked it all—the mysterious drum, the foundry-smoke, the struggle with the fumes and the struggle with Blum. He liked Blum himself. The only thing he didn’t like was that Ryzhikov had been attached to the foundry, too, —with the job of bringing in the sand.

6

Button Holes

Wanda Stadnitskaya (found it hard to get used to the fifth girls’ detachment. Somehow the tidiness and cleanliness of the dormitory, the gentle tact of her new comrades, their chatter in the evenings and the strict orderly way the days were run in the colony, all these things she failed to notice. She would listen in silence to the instructions Klava Kashirina gave her, nod her head, and then quickly go off to stand for hours on end at the window, gazing at ‘the same part of the landscape —the path to the park, running far into the distance, the tops of a row of birch trees, and the sky. When she was in the dining-hall, she sat on the edge of her chair as if she was ready to jump up any minute and run away; she ate little and hardly raised her eyes from her plate. She was even quite

indifferent and unmoved by the new school dress given her on the first day: a blue pleated woollen skirt and two pretty lawn blouses—the attire, at once simple and elegant, which suited her so well and made her look young, pink and beautiful with her glistening, well-washed hair.

In the dressmaking-shop, which was located in one of the class-rooms, Wanda was offered a serious job, but it looked as if she was not capable of doing anything at all. Then they put her on to stitching buttonholes. This was a job usually given to the half dozen or so youngest kids in the detachment, those dashing, jolly, thin-legged girls who kept dolls somewhere in a corner of the dormitory. But Wanda stitched buttonholes very badly, too, being slow and lazy at her work. The older girls watched her in silence, exchanged disapproving glances with each other, taught her corrected her. Wanda listened submissively to all their comments, handed them her work for a time, and, with dull eyes, watched askance as the pink experienced little fingers flashed deftly to and fro.

One day Wanda entered the shop long after the sewing-machines had started to hum.

“Why are you late, Wanda?” asked Klava without making a break in her work.

Wanda did not answer,

“And yesterday you left before the end. Why was that?”

Suddenly Wanda burst into speech: ““All right, then, I’ll tell you. I’m not going on working, I don’t want to.”

“Not going to work? But how are you going to live, then?”

“I don’t care. I can live without stitching buttonholes.”

“Shame, Wanda! You’ve got to learn. We all started on buttonholes.”

Wanda broke off working. She felt a lump rising in her throat and looked wildly round the room.

“Oh, it’s different with you! You started on buttonholes! I’ll end in some rotten hole!”

She left the room, slamming the door.

In the evening she lay in bed with her face turned to the wall and did not go down for supper. The girls looked at the tender blonde nape of her neck with eyes full of alarm. Klava frowned and muttered something to herself.

The next morning, while Wanda was pacing the dormitory alone, Zakharov came in. His appearance brought a blush to her cheeks and she smoothed her skirt. He smiled sadly and sat at the table.

“What’s the matter, Wanda?”

She did not reply and went on staring out of the window. He fell silent.

“Would you like to work in the carpenter-shop?” he asked at last. “It’s interesting work there—with wood.”

She turned swiftly on him.

“Oh, you’re a one! Fancy thinking of that! The carpenter-shop!”

“It’s a very good idea. Just imagine—you in the carpenter-shop!”

“They’d laugh at me.”

“On the contrary. You’d be the First girl in our colony to start carpentry. What an honour for you! Girls always think their jobs are with the rags. That’s wrong.”

Wanda raised her eyebrows in a challenging way.

“You know what? I’ll do it! I’ll join the carpenter-shop! Can I start straightaway?”

“Let’s go there now.”

“Yes, come on.”

Zakharov turned on his heel and without looking back, went towards the door. She skipped after him and grasped his arm.

“Did you think of this on purpose?” she asked.

“Of course I did.”

“You do everything on purpose, don’t you?”

“Definitely everything,” he replied with a laugh. “I’ve arranged something else but I’m not going to tell you what it is.”

“Tell me. Is it about me?”

“Yes, it’s about you.”

“Do tell me, Alexei Stepanovich!”

He bent down to her ear and whispered mysteriously: “I’ll tell you later on.”

Wanda’s reply came in the same confidential whisper: “All right.”

7

The Yoke

One day after work, Igor decided to take a walk in the outskirts of the colony. Taking a book with him, he passed through the park and came to a dam. On the left gleamed the pond, on the right a stream just managed to trickle through a reedy valley between two Hill slopes. On the crest of the hillock opposite there stood a small house, its whitewashed front a motley of lilac, blue and pink convolvulus bells right up to the tiled roof. A row of poplars strode right up to the house, behind which there was a low-lying shady garden. There were no trees on this side and a small patch was fenced in with hurdles to form a vegetable garden. It did not look like a peasant’s vegetable plot; there were paths between the beds, with small wooden benches here and there.

Igor peeped through the fence. There -was nobody in the garden but he noticed a large reddish-coated dog lying at the foot of one of the benches. When the dog saw Igor it got up, growled, stretched itself and ran off towards the house. Igor took a look round the garden and noticed that the beds closest to the fence had been watered and that there was an empty watering-can propped up against a mound. “Where do they get their water from?” he asked himself; then he noticed a wicket-gate, held to by a piece of old wire. Beyond that he saw a narrow, well-trodden track running down to the stream; at the end of this path, straight out of the reeds, Oksana was slowly climbing with a couple of buckets hanging from a yoke. They were big buckets with fresh green paint on them, and

the way they hung, scarcely swaying on the yoke, showed that they were heavy. That was clear, too, from the care and effort with which Oksana took her short steps.

Igor ran down quickly and laid hold of the handle of the nearest bucket. Staggering from the impact, Oksana raised her frightened eyes: "Oh!"

"I'm going to help you."

"Oh, there's no need! Please don't touch it."

Igor was quite surprised to realize how much strength he had in reserve. He blithely tossed up the smooth convex-shaped yoke with one hand and caught it in the other. Oksana just managed to jump out of the way of the buckets and yoke as they swung round.

"Who asked you to help?" she exclaimed angrily, springing back. "Why are you hanging about me like this?"

"Nobody's got the right, lady...."

He found it difficult to complete the sentence; the yoke swung on his shoulder as if it were on a hinge. Igor tried to stop it but only made matters worse, for the pressure of his hand upset the whole balance and sent one bucket dipping towards the ground while the other rose almost above his head. Oksana was now laughing.

"You won't be able to manage it, it's hard unless you're used to it. Put it down. Now you're really in a fix! Put it down, I tell you!"

Igor had already realized that he would have to lower the buckets to the ground. Oksana was addressing him in friendly terms. He felt fine.

"Oksana dear! That's a good idea of yours. I'll put them down. To hell with this antediluvian invention! What's it called?"

"Why, it's a yoke!"

"A yoke, do you call it? Well, here it is for keeps."

He took a bucket in each hand and set off up the slope. They were so heavy that he even lost his power of speech. Oksana followed him.

"Where did you spring from with your help?" she asked him, speaking worriedly. "Put the buckets down, I tell you!"

But when Igor stood the buckets at the fence she looked at him from under her quivering eyelashes and smiled.

"Thanks," she said.

"How can you—er—carry so much?" he asked. "They're damn heavy. It's sheer exploitation."

"Well, what do you expect me to do? Manage without water? Why, nothing would grow!"

"In such cases the proper thing to do is to arrange a water-pumping system, instead of using these yoke affairs."

"In our village everybody uses yokes. It's no distance here. And the water's good, it comes from a spring."

Oksana had already started to work in the garden. She lifted the bucket with ease, poured some water into the watering-can, and went along the narrow track between the potato-beds. Igor was lost in admiration of her lovely head, with the dark chestnut locks tumbling forward over the temples as she bent over her work. She looked at him out of the corner of her eye but, said nothing.

“Come on, let me help you!” Igor said.

“There isn’t another can.”

“Give me that one, then.”

“You don’t know how to do it.”

“Why do you work so hard? Your boss is exploiting you. He gets the profit, the rotter, and you do the work.”

“Everybody works,” said Oksana.

“Does he work?”

“Yes.”

“He’s an exploiter, that’s what your boss is. Does he have the right to keep a farm-hand? Tell me, does he?”

“I’m not a farm-hand. And you’re quite wrong when you say he’s my boss. He’s a good man, better than any you’ve ever seen. Don’t you dare to say such things,” retorted Oksana, looking at Igor with pained anger.

She tipped over the watering-can to give its last trickle to the leaves of the plants.

“Everybody needs potatoes. Do you like potatoes?”

For some reason Igor found no reply to this question.

“Have you ever eaten potatoes you’ve grown yourself?” This frontal question was joined by another which came from behind Igor: “Am I butting in? Do tell me if I am, so to speak, in the way!”

Igor swung round and saw that it was Misha Gontar. Gem tar was in parade uniform, but it did not set him off to any advantage. Its broad white collar even seemed to clash somewhat with his face, now wearing an expression of mingled suspicion and discontent.

“Good afternoon, Misha,” said Oksana to him. “You’re not in the way at all.”

“Misha’s jealous,” said Igor with a sarcastic smile.

Oksana gave an angry start. Gontar, too, was incensed.

“You’d do better to hold your tongue, Chernyavin!” he exclaimed.

A young feminine voice sounded from within the cottage: “Oksana! Come in! Quick!”

Oksana laid the watering-can down and ran off.

The two boys remained silent for a while; then Gontar kicked at the fence with the toe of a well-polished boot and said in a hoarse, halting voice:

“You’d better keep away from here, Chernyavin!”

“What do you mean keep away?”

“Just what I say, keep away? You’ve *got* nothing to do here.”

“But what if I find myself a job to do here?”

“What do you mean? Find yourself a job!”

“Well, such as watering potatoes.”

“Keep away, I’m telling you!”

Igor leaned over the fence.

“I’ll just think it over: to come or to keep away!”

“Get the hell out of here!” Misha shouted, suddenly. “Find another place to do your thinking in!”

Igor stepped back from the fence and cast a knowing, concentrated look at Gontar.

“You are over head and ears in love, Milord!”

Gontar’s pale-grey broadly-set eyes flashed fire. He shook his head till his stiff hair fell all over his brow and ears.

“It’s young toffs like you who fall in love!”

Igor uttered a peal of demonic laughter and ran off towards the pond.

8

Everyone Has His Own Taste

Ryzhikov was coolly received by the first detachment. His fleshy, restless face and greenish eyes did not inspire much confidence. They were aware that Igor Chernyavin, an old acquaintance of Ryzhikov, far from welcoming him on arrival, had at once pounced on him and tried to throttle him. Displeased with having Ryzhikov assigned to his detachment, Volenko went to argue with Vitya Torsky; he already had Levitin, Ruslan Gorokhov, Nozhik and now this Ryzhikov had been added to the list. Torsky, however, was in no way impressed.

“Do you think you’re the only one who has them?” he asked. “Just look at the eighth with Gontar, Seredin, Yanovsky, and now Chernyavin! Or take the tenth: they’ve got Sinlchka, Smekhotin, Boroda—and what a youngster for a commander, too, Ilyusha Rudnev. And here are you making a fuss about Nozhik! Why, Nozhik’s a good little fellow except that he tells tall stories! Added to which you’ve got some activists really worth something: Kolos, Radchenko, Yablochkin, Blomberg. All right, swap Ryzhikov for Chernyavin,”

Volenko pondered over the matter and went away in silence.

After calling the first detachment together and introducing its members to Ryzhikov in a few terse phrases. Volenko said: “Listen to me, Ryzhikov. I know you’re not used to living in an organized labour collective. Let me give you a piece of advice: get used to it as quickly as you can. There’s no other way for you, whatever you may think.”

There was no answer from Ryzhikov. He had already begun to understand what an organized labour collective meant. He was put in the charge of curly-headed, snub-nosed Vladimir Kolos, a clever self-confident pupil in the tenth form who belonged to the

bureau of the Komsomol organization and did not care for long parley or honeyed phrases.

"I've been put in charge of you," he told Ryzhikov, "but don't you think that I'm going to take you under my wing as if you were a chicken. I can see right through you and half a metre beyond, and I know everything you've got in your mind. You've got a mess in there which still needs tidying up. You'd better attend to that. As for colony life—well, it goes all around you. There's no catch in it. Just look and learn. If you don't want to, it means you're a very bad lot."

Ryzhikov, who felt that it was he who really did see through Kolos, replied, with feeling: "Don't worry, I'll learn."

"That remains to be seen," Kolos said dryly, and left him.

Next day, Ryzhikov made friends with Ruslan Gorokhov.

Ruslan spoke to him first: "You're being put in the foundry, aren't you?"

"Yes."

"Carrying sand, eh?"

"That's right."

"Just as I thought. Have you been clipped yet?"

"Yes."

"All according to the rules. Going to stay here?"

"Do you think I'm crazy?" Ryzhikov said, turning away, offended.

Ruslan gave a loud laugh, revealing¹ his uneven teeth, and asked Ryzhikov to come for a walk with him in the woods. After this walk Ryzhikov suddenly changed into the happiest of fellows, talking right and left to everybody with or without pretext, exercising his wit and hanging around Volenko. To Igor's great surprise, he stopped him amidst the flower-beds.

"Still angry with me, Chernyavin?" he asked.

Igor looked at him with antipathy, but remembering the words of commander on duty Rudnev, replied:

"I'm not angry with you, but all the same it was swinish the way you treated Vanya."

"Oh, drop that, Igor. What was *so* swinish about it? He -was going to the colony anyway, and I had to live somehow. There was nothing wrong in it." "Well, are you going to stick on here?" "That's just what I want to talk to you about. Shall I or shan't I? What about you?"

Ryzhikov's behaviour was hard to fathom. On the one hand, he was being thoughtful and serious and placing confidence in a comrade whose advice he apparently valued. On the other hand, he was making it quite clear that he was a man of the world who knew his price. He went on spitting at regular intervals, cocking an eyebrow and casting casual glances round the flower-garden, which were intended to mean that he wasn't going to be bought over by the flowers. Igor rather enjoyed the game for it reminded him of his former adventurous "free life." So as not to forego his own rights to the honour of being a man of the world, he replied to Ryzhikov:

"I have my own plans but in any case I'm not going to steal."

"Everyone has his own taste," said Ryzhikov, setting the seal on his approval by spitting once more. They entered the vestibule. Armed with a rifle, plump little Lena Ivanova stood there, a happy look on her eyebrow-less face. She made way for them. Then, noticing Ryzhikov's behaviour, she frowned. As he stood on the wet rag, Ryzhikov was puffing away at his cigarette and taking no notice of Lena.

"Smoking's forbidden in here," Lena said in a loud voice.

Ryzhikov slowly turned his eyes on Lena and puffed a cloud of smoke into her face.

"What do you think you're, doing, 'you lout?" she shrieked at him. "Smoking's forbidden, I tell you!"

Ryzhikov turned towards Igor with studied casual-ness.

"They're all the same, the little squealers!" he exclaimed.

He expressed his irritation by spitting.

Lena shuddered so violently that her parade uniform was all a-tremble.

"Wipe it up!" she declared in a peremptory tone.

"What?"

"Wipe it up!" she repeated. "What do you mean by spitting? Wipe it up!"

Ryzhikov grinned; then, turning sharply so that he stood sideways to her, he drew the palm of his hand up her face from chin to forehead.

"Shut up, you skirt!" he said.

Clenching her teeth Lena gave him an unexpectedly hard knock with her rifle.

"Ouch! So that's your game!" exclaimed the enraged Ryzhikov.

Igor gripped him by the shoulder and swung him round sharply.

"Hey you!" he cried.

"So you're a squealer, too."

"Keep your hands off that girl!"

"Not after she's hit me like that right in the belly, the bitch!"

Lena ran to the foot of the stairs.

"What's your name?" she called in ringing tones. "Give me your name!"

The figure of commander on duty Klava Kashirina appeared in the mirror at the head of the stairs. Lena shouldered her rifle.

"Let's go, here comes one of the bosses," said Ryzhikov, giving" Igor a nudge.

As he went out into the yard, he looked at Lena.

"I'll give you a good hiding one of these days," he said to her.

The two boys left the building.

As she came down the stairs Klava cast a quizzical glance at Lena. The little girl said nothing, but holding herself at attention, raised one hand and wiped away her tears.

A Juridical Point

Ryzhikov, Ruslan and Igor talked things over in the park.

"It'll bring you no good, laying your hands on that girl," said Ruslan.

"What do you mean? Every skunk bossing me about!"

"They'll have you before the general meeting today."

"I don't care."

"You'll have to stand in the middle of the floor."

"Just let 'em try."

"They'll get you there all right."

"We'll see about that."

Ryzhikov looked as if he really meant that he would not go into the middle of the floor. Igor liked that.

"This is getting interesting. So you won't go!"

"You'll see me dead before I do."

"Fine! This is going to be fun!"

All day Ryzhikov walked round the colony with an air of independence. News of the incident in the vestibule had spread and he was regarded with a certain interest, though it was difficult to decipher the exact nature of that interest.

The general meeting opened at eight o'clock, after supper. Tight as they sat, not all the colonists could find room on the long benches round the walls of the Quiet Room. The small fry clustered together on the carpet round the bust of Stalin, or on the steps of its dais, their hare knees catching the eyes of all. One corner of the room was occupied by the girls, though there was a sprinkling of them among the boys, too.

The little fellows left a space on the dais clear for the speakers. Chairman Torsky sat on the fop step, his back against the marble pedestal, and the small fry swarmed round him like bees round a honey-pot. At the edge of the dais stood Blum.

"I understand very well that making shorts is not a very pleasant occupation," he said in his speech. "But it's very pleasant to wear those shorts, specially at a holiday resort, and that's something you're overlooking, comrades. You see, if you don't want to make shorts here, and others don't want to, and nobody wants to do the job—well, who is going to make the shorts? It's the same with everything. You didn't ask the bricklayers whether they liked building your house for you, did you? And you didn't ask the roofers or the carpenters either, did you? And what about the people who bake your bread for you here, have you asked them whether it's a pleasant job or not? You sit here and think this way: 'Here we are, in the First of May Colony, fine fellows all of us, the best of the best; we don't want to make shorts and we don't want to make oil-cans or theatre seats, what we want to do is to make tail-coats-and sewing-machines and furniture in rococo or

Louis-XVII style.' You eat meat for your dinner, don't you, but do you realize that this meat was once on four feet and had a tail and ate grass. And that the boys and* girls who look after it are not called First-of-May colonists but simply cowherds? Everybody else is quite satisfied; you're the only dissatisfied ones, eh? Here are you with your parquet floors, your flowers, your school and your music, a cinema, four fine workshops. Yet It's not enough, you want the last word in modern machinery so that you can build locomotives and" aeroplanes, and have that blooming-mill, maybe, that you're always hankering after I challenge any one of you to .get up and say I'm wrong. I'd just like to hear what he had to say."

Still wearing that eager smile that spread almost to the nape of his neck, Blum stepped down from the dais and sat on the bench, where 'the 'boys had been, zealously saving his place for him. But as he settled down and folded his hands on his fat stomach, he took another look round the gathering. The colonists were smiling, some in open distrust, others with embarrassment, and others with eager assurance. Blum turned; to Zakharov who sat near him on the same bench.

"What do you say? They've still got their own ideas,, anyway," he said.

Zakharov gave a cryptic smile and glanced towards the nest speaker. Sancho Zorin had taken his place on the dais; he held his fist raised as a preliminary to speaking.

"Oh, you're a sly fellow, Solomon Davidovich!" he began. "The girls make a thousand pairs of shorts a day, which is thirty roubles profit every day. Nine hundred a month, ten thousand a year. Isn't that something? But as soon as the girls want to learn how to cut out, you suddenly remember the bricklayers and cowherds and locomotives. But have we said anything? Why, we're very grateful to the bricklayers. And as for the cowherds, well, when we've got a socialist economy we shan't need so many of them, for the feeding will be done in the sheds. But if you want to know, let me tell you that I was a cowherd myself. Well, it was a job, only it was working for a kulak, of course. Now I'm a carpenter and I want to become *a* scientist; and I will be one, you'll see. Well, what does that mean?" Soviet power gives everybody a chance! We can build locomotives and blooming-mills. It's not the case now that if you're a cowherd you've got to spend all your life among the cattle. You do it for a bit, and then off you go to college. That's so, isn't it? So what I propose is that if the girls want—let them have an instructor to teach them cutting-out. Maybe it'll be useful to them later. One thing surprises me, though; why are these girls kept at dressmaking all the time? I very much approve, in fact, I feel like praising the new girl we have, Wanda Stadnitskaya. She's in the assembly-shop. She's a smart girl, really smart; why, she'll show the Komsomol members the way to work, though she's not at all experienced yet."

Wanda took cover in the midst of the fifth detachment. She even hid her face behind someone's shoulder so that the general meeting should not see her blushing cheeks.

At the other side of the room, Chernyavin and Ruslan had found places on the bench. In front of them, Ryzhikov occupied a chair, looking very much the debonair hero of the day. He listened intermittently and looked around at everybody with brazen eyes, though all those present were strangers to him, as yet. Misha Gontar sat a little way further along the bench.

"It looks as if they've forgotten about you, Ryzhikov," Ruslan said in a low voice. "You're in luck."

"To hell with them, all the same."

Gontar looked in their direction.

"Don't worry, my dears, they've not forgotten. They all know about it."

"I spit on them all," said Ryzhikov.

"Don't spit too much. You're going to be put through it out there."

"D'you think I'm going?"

"Well, if you don't what about afterwards?"

"What happens afterwards?"

"Poor chap! I'm already feeling sorry for you. Better go out there!"

"Are you trying to put the wind up me?"

"I'm telling you, chum, you'd do best to go through it now."

Igor was so thrilled that he struck his knee with his fist.

"Oh, this is going to be interesting! Don't go, Ryzhikov, you just show 'em!"

"Well, well, the world never grows wiser!" said Gontar with a melancholy smile. "I was just the same myself—a fool."

The matter of the instructor for dress-cutting had been put do the vote.

"How about the reports, Klava?" asked Vitya Torsky.

Ryzhikov, Igor and Ruslan stuck their heads forward. Gontar took on the air of a sorcerer whose prophecies were beginning to come true.

"Next for shaving, please," he whispered.

"Everything's in order according to the reports," Klava declared. "The only place where there's anything wrong is in the first detachment: Ryzhikov refused to obey the day-sentry Lena Ivanova and insulted her."

Klava handed Torsky a slip of paper. He read it without comment and nodded.

"Uh-hhh. Ryzhikov!"

The room became quiet.

"What's the matter?" replied Ryzhikov blithely. He strove to make his voice sound witty and alert.

Every head turned towards him in silence. Torsky looked at him in a way that meant: Come out into the middle.

Ryzhikov shifted on his chair awkwardly but not without some defiance.

"I'm not coming anywhere," he exclaimed.

Now those faces which had just before recorded mild interest suddenly grew sharp, while round the room 'ran a faint buzz of excitement.

"What do you mean, you won't come?" Torsky demanded in surprise.

In the crushing, stupefying silence, Ryzhikov leaned back, one arm dangling over the back of his chair.

“I’m not coming, that’s all!”

It was as though a bomb had burst in the room. Shouts came from all sides, while from the dais the little fellows demanded something in chorus. It was in that direction that Ryzhikov forced himself to look. His eyes met faces that blazed with fury. He heard the cries:

“Oh! So he won’t come!”

“You’ll come, my lovely!”

“Get up, what are you sprawling there for?”

“Who’s this Ryzhikov, anyway?”

“Hey, you hero!”

Zyriansky sprang to his feet and started forward.

“Get back to your place, Zyriansky!” Torsky ordered sharply.

Zyriansky at once sank back on the bench, but his whole body strained to leap forward again. The general hubbub rose a pitch or two.

“Just look at him!”

“I’ll go for him myself!”

“Assing about like that!”

“Out with you!”

Igor could hardly keep up with all that was happening.... Ryzhikov was about to say something; his face already wore an insolent expression in preparation for it, and he even rose slightly from his chair. With one hand Gontar at once pulled the chair away from under him and, with the other, shoved him towards the middle of the room.

Finding himself in the open, brightly-lit space, Ryzhikov did not at first grasp what had happened. But he felt that his powers were vanishing. Displeased, he shrugged one shoulder and muttered what was probably a swear word; then he put his hands in his pockets, but, looking ahead, caught sight unexpectedly of Zyriansky, who, straining forward on his seat on the bench, thumped his knee with his fist in wrathful indignation as soon as their eyes met. A burst of loud laughter rang out in the room. This staggered Ryzhikov, who could not understand the reason for it and advanced mechanically into the cold, bare desert that lay in the middle of the room. Yet he kept his hands in his pockets and his feet adopted an absurd stance, reminiscent of a ballet-dancer’s. As though responding to a conductor’s baton the voices rang out cheerfully in a general buoyant demand: “Stand to attention!”

By then, Ryzhikov had no powers of resistance left. He drew his feet together and straightened up, though he still kept one hand in his pocket. And then the silence was broken by the words of the chairman, spoken in a quiet but commanding tone:

“Take your hand out of your pocket.”

To keep up appearances, Ryzhikov cast a look of discontent over the heads of the ranks of seated colonists; then he removed his hand from his pocket. Igor could not contain himself: "He's cooked, Signori!"

"Behave yourself, Chernyavin!"

Ryzhikov was, in fact, "cooked," which was why he tried to avoid looking at the colonists. There were two expressions to be found on their faces: lingering anger, the smiles of victory.

Torsky came straight to the point.

"Are you in the first detachment?" he asked.

"That's right," replied Ryzhikov hoarsely, his eyes still above everyone's heads.

"Explain why you disobeyed the day sentry and insulted her."

"I didn't insult anybody. She pushed me herself."

A quick, light laugh ran round the room.

"You say you didn't insult anybody? Why, you shoved your hand in her face!"

"I didn't do anything of the sort. Who saw me?"

This time the laughter lasted longer. Even Torsky smiled. Blum's stomach heaved below his crossed hands. Zakharov adjusted his pince-nez.

"What an ass you are!" exclaimed Torsky. "We don't need witnesses."

Ryzhikov was aware that the colonists were making a fool of him, but he was sufficiently versed in life to know how important witnesses were.

"So you believe her and not me."

And as always when he felt sure of a juridical point in his own favour, he assumed an injured look and introduced a faint tremor into his voice. Strange as it was, however, this manoeuvre, which people of experience took to be quite invulnerable, was met not with a mere laugh but by a spirited guffaw.

"What's there to laugh at?" Ryzhikov shrieked in anger. "Who saw me, I'm asking?"

The boys were obviously expecting so much more to come that they did not dare to laugh for fear the cup of delight brimmed over. Enraptured, they looked at Ryzhikov and waited. Torsky resumed his patient interrogation:

"All right, say nobody saw you. Does that mean you can insult a person, so long as you are not seen by anyone?"

Ryzhikov had never come across such a strange idea as that. He fell silent. Then he raised his eyes to the chairman and said in a simple, persuasive tone: "All I can say is that she's lying. Nobody saw it happen!"

Igor Chernyavin stood up. Torsky and the others looked at him questioningly.

"Ryzhikov is somewhat mistaken," Igor said. "I, for instance, had the pleasure of seeing how he shoved his hand in her face."

"You did?" Ryzhikov said, turning quickly. "Yes, I did."

"Are you saying you saw me?" "I am."

Now the laughter was hostile, censorious. It was no longer a matter of delight for its own sake; after all, it wasn't pleasant to watch a man who had been demanding a witness in an injured voice while the witness had been sitting next to him. Zyriansky raised an arm let me speak." "Go ahead."

"What is there to discuss? Where did he come from? How dare you disobey our rules, Ryzhikov? How dare you lay your paw on a girl's face? What right have you to do it, I ask?"

Zyriansky took a stride towards Ryzhikov, who turned away from him.

"Kick him out! Without a moment's delay! Open the door and—out with him! Look at him, asking for a witness! I propose we take him and..." "Kick him out," someone added. Zyriansky smiled at that: "Of course you won't kick him out, you soft-hearted folk, but you really should."

Zyriansky made a gesture that invited his habitual opponent Volenko, to speak. Volenko did not fail him.

"Ryzhikov's in my detachment. To put it bluntly he's a bit of a mystery-man, and he always keeps going around with Ruslan."

"Why drag me in?" shouted Ruslan.

"We'll have something to say about you too one of these days. All the same it's my opinion that we can make something useful out of Ryzhikov. He's not one of your stuck-up toffs. His past, of course, is none of our business, but all the same, let him tell us who his father was."

"Answer, Ryzhikov," said Torsky. "Can you tell us?"

"Yes, I can. He was a merchant."

"Is he dead?"

"No."

"Where is he?"

"I don't know."

"You've no idea?"

"He ran away somewhere."

"We oughtn't to kick him out," continued Volenko. "He needs to be punished, but he ought to stay in the colony. We'll see maybe we'll still manage to make a Soviet man out of him."

Zakharov rose to his feet.

"I don't think there's any need to punish him," he said. "The man's still only semi-civilized."

"What do you mean, semi-civilized?" Ryzhikov echoed, highly displeased.

"What I said. You don't yet understand such a trifling thing as not spitting. It requires someone to go after you tidying up—washing up your little messes. That really isn't so very difficult to understand. The first detachment will have to teach Ryzhikov how to become a civilized person. Laying his hands on a girl's face! Only savages can do such

things and yet you aren't a savage for you've been to school for three years. I propose that he shouldn't be punished and that the meeting express its sympathy with Lena."

The meeting quickly came to an end. Zyriansky withdrew his proposal.

"You may go," Torsky told Ryzhikov, "but you'd better be careful."

Ryzhikov turned to go.

"Wait a minute. Salute the general meeting."

Ryzhikov smiled superciliously and raised his arm.

"Lena, the general meeting expresses its sympathy with you and asks you to forget the incident."

On the way up to the dormitories, Ryzhikov stopped on the stairs and looked down at Igor:

"So you've turned squealer, Chernyavin?"

"When have I done that?"

"When, you ask? Witness, huh! What's it got to do with you?"

Igor slapped himself on the side.

"Oh! What the hell have I gone and done? Was that you out there in the middle? All I could see was that it was some ginger-headed fellow. I thought it was somebody else. And you mean to say it was really you out there?"

Ruslan's roar of laughter was heard up the whole staircase. Ryzhikov went on looking at Igor with disdain until Vladimir Kolos came up the stairs. He tapped Ryzhikov-on the shoulder.

"Congratulations," he said. "That's an important event, brother: first time in the middle. Now everything will go smoothly. All the same you ought to stand to attention before the meeting."

10

The Kiss

Once a week, there was a film show in the colony-theatre, a large hall with four hundred oak seats of the-colony's own manufacture. The cinema was patronized by members of the staff with their families, young people from Gostilovka, and friends from the city. The running of these shows did not cause any trouble to the-colonists. A colonist of the ninth detachment, Petrov the second, who from 'his earliest days had been a film-fan and was determined to devote the rest of his life to this 20th century miracle, set off for the city early in the morning in a dray. He was sixteen years old, which was sufficient to make him certain that he had acquired all the wisdom life had to offer. This boiled down to a very simple and pleasant conclusion: a man ought to be-a cinema operator even if that entailed taking an examination. But, off course, the bureaucrats wouldn't let Petrov sit for his examination till he was eighteen, and that made Petrov the second hate the bureaucrats he called on once a week to get the next film for the colony. Being, on the whole, polite and good-natured to the point of spinelessness, he managed to say so many unpleasant things to the film bureaucrats when he was collecting the sets of round tin

boxes that gradually they reached a state of absolute frenzy. One fine day they arrived suddenly at the colony, in a body, the three of them, and discovered that the films were being-projected not by a fully-authorized skilled operator but by that very Petrov the second who came to them each week with an empty bag and poured recriminations on them about their bureaucracy. Petrov the second was not at a loss for words even then, but the affair had a sad ending: the projector was sealed up, the colony fined fifty roubles, and a long document was drawn up containing a whole lot of officialese. Public opinion was quite reasonably on Petrov's side for it was clear to all that being sixteen does not handicap a fellow from being a genius in one sphere or another.

Public opinion, nevertheless, placed some of the blame on Petrov himself. In his speech at the general meeting Zyriansky put it this way:

"Petrov the second also deserves to get it hot. It's wrong to think you can struggle against bureaucrats on your own. They must be brought before a general meeting and spoken to on the spot."

Now, after the collapse of Petrov the second's policy, the main trouble was that the eve of the holiday found the colony with nothing to show the public, which had got into the habit of coming to the colony on that day. It was, of course, Pyotr Vasilyevich Malenky who found a way out. Malenky suggested that they should stage a play.

The colony drama group which had worked sluggishly enough in the winter had broken up completely in the summer since nobody wanted to give up the summer evenings for rehearsals. In winter-time, too, even the most active members of the drama group in their heart of hearts preferred the cinema. But now they had been deprived of film shows by an act of bureaucracy and they could not expect to have them back until the entire projection booth had been covered with asbestos and a grown-up operator found.

Malenky issued an appeal. Volunteers were few so the new boys were persuaded to take an interest in drama. Chernyavin was to play the third partisan and parts were also found for Vanya Galchenko and Volodya Begunok. Rehearsals went fast and smoothly; the scenery for the forest and the landowner's estate were in authentic style: pine branches were used to represent the forest, the country-house was built out of plywood.

On the day of the performance, when all the costumes had been brought, and the audience was beginning to gather, Igor took a look round the park, and, to his great delight, saw Oksana sitting all alone on the very first bench. Foreseeing his success on the stage, he was in an exalted mood. That day Oksana was the most beautiful girl in the world: she was wearing a well-ironed pink blouse and held a bunch of cornflowers in her hand.

"You do look lovely today, Oksana!"

The girl moved away from him in fright, and when Igor made a move in her direction, sprang up and backed away from him along the path.

"You a colonist! Is that the way to behave!?"

"What eyes you've got, Oksana!"

Oksana raised the hand that held the cornflowers to her eyes.

"Go away! Leave me alone, I tell you!"

But Igor did not go away. He strode boldly towards her, and with one sweep of his arm embraced her neck, her hand and the bunch of flowers. Afterwards, he could never remember whether he had kissed her or not, but she gave a piercing shriek and pushed him away—the flowers struck him in the eyes and hurt him.

“Chernyavin!” somebody cried angrily.

He looked round: Klava Kashirina’s clear grey eyes were on him. Patches of colour mantled her delicate hued cheeks.

“How could you insult a girl like that?”

More because of his confusion than from any desire to be impertinent, Igor replied, in a low voice:

“It wasn’t meant as an insult. . . .”

In her fury Klava stamped her foot.

“Get away from here! Go and find commander on duty Volenko at once and tell him everything. Understand?”

Igor understood nothing and rushed along the path towards the house. But fast as he fled, the sound of muffled sobs reached his ears. He did not dare to look round.

11

A Gay Dog

Quite beside himself, Igor burst into the theatre dressing-room. To begin with, there was absolutely no doubt that he, Igor Chernyavin, had fallen in love with Oksana, was simply gone on her, madly so. ... Such a misfortune had never befallen him, and here it was. . . . All the symptoms were there: nobody but a fellow smitten with love would fall on a girl with kisses like that. In the second place, Igor already heard that terrible question which would be put at the general meeting: “Explain your behaviour, Chernyavin. . . .” As he ran through the park and across the yard, suffering and blushing, he remembered that brow, those eyes, the bunch of flowers, the devil take them all. And he also remembered about Volenko. Not for the world was Igor going to tell him anything about it. The general meeting, Igor standing out there in the middle, everybody hooting with laughter... the little fellows, oh, those little fellows with the bare knees!

Flinging open the stage-door, Igor bumped into Volenko, who looked at him severely—his usual look, by the way. Igor let him pass and broke into a cold sweat.

“Where were you, Chernyavin? Hurry up!”

Confusion reigned in the dressing-room. Zakharov, assisted by Malenky and Vitya Torsky, was making up the actors. Several of them were trying on their costumes: partisans, commanders, officers, and women. Torsky, clad in a priest’s frock and bewigged, said to Igor: “Get dressed quick, Chernyavin! You’re third partisan, aren’t you?”

“That’s right. Of course, you realize I’ve never been a partisan....”

“There’s nothing special to it! Just be a partisan, that’s all. You’ve got the right mug for it today! Who gave you that black eye?”

Igor had for some time been feeling that his right eye was swelling up.

“Oh, I caught it on something...”

“Well, that happens—you bump up against somebody’s fist and then look as if you’ve come straight off the battlefield. Tie this length of cord round your waist, wrap some cloth round your feet, and put on these bast shoes.”

Igor sat down on the bench to put on the shoes.

“How do you tie them? I’ve never worn them before.”

Lieutenant Zorin was drawing an officer’s dress belt in tight round an old khaki shirt:

“Well, do you think I’ve ever worn shoulder-straps? But I have (o now.”

Igor bent down over his complicated footwear, pondering at length about the two long pieces of string attached to the bast shoes. First partisan Yanovsky, wearing an incredibly red beard matched with jet-black eyebrows, raised a foot.

“That’s the way it’s done, you see!”

To tell the truth Igor did not see anything because Klava Kashirina was standing at the door with her eyes on Igor. He furrowed his brow and busied himself with the strings. Klava looked at him hard and went away.

Malenky, dressed in a general’s long greatcoat with a red collar, beckoned Igor to an empty chair: “Sit down, ‘Chernyavin. What part are you playing?”

“Third partisan.”

“Third! H’m. We’ll make you—well, er—let’s take this beard. You’ll be a very poor peasant, so poor that even your beard won’t grow properly. Rub some Vaseline on.”

Igor began to smear himself with the yellowish grease. Malenky drew a dirty tousled wig on his clipped skull, and Igor saw a comic wide-mouthed face looking back at him from the mirror. Malenky went over this unfamiliar face with his pencil.

“Where are my medals, Vitya?” Malenky asked Torsky.

“Rogov will bring them in a moment. The stars haven’t dried out yet but the ribbon’s hanging over there.”

He pointed to a broad light-blue ribbon hanging from a nail.

Zakharov also glanced at the ribbon:

“That’s no good. This is the Civil War. We don’t want stars, either.”

“What sort of general do you expect him to be without stars?” Victor asked with a look of surprise at Zakharov. “As for the ribbon ... it took a lot of getting out of the girls.”

“That’s the ribbon of the Order of St. Andrew, which-only very important statesmen used to wear.”

Malenky took the ribbon off the nail and hung it over his shoulder.

“Don’t worry, Alexei Stepanovich, the public will like it. But listen, you fellows, when you jump on me, don’t overdo it. I felt absolutely done up when I got home after the last rehearsal.”

“What else do you expect us to do with a White-guard general?” asked Yanovsky with a smile. “Play kiss-in-the-ring with him?”

The door banged as Vanya and Begunok rushed in.

“Does it look right, Alexei Stepanovich? Do tell me!” cried Begunok.

Both of the lads were wearing sheepskin coats turned inside out. Volodya dropped on all fours, donned a long-nosed dog’s mask and ran like a savage dog, barking and snapping at Zakharov’s boots. Vanya acted likewise so that the dressing-room was filled with a hubbub of barks and laughter. Vanya’s performance was the more accomplished, for he managed to imitate a particularly impatient, resentful kind of yelp, followed by high-pitched frightened barks.

“Shut up!” yelled Torsky. “You kids are the limit! We haven’t put on the show yet, but you’ve been running-round the colony for three days on end, snapping at everybody.”

“Judging by your coats you look ‘more ‘like bear-cubs,” said Zakharov with a smile. “I think you’ll pass, though. If we’re going to have a general wearing the

Order of St. Andrew it’s quite fitting that the dogs should look ghastly.”

Gratified by the success of their rehearsal, Volodya and Vanya padded off on all fours to the stage..

The performance began in half an hour. Torsky got the “dogs” seated in the wings, and told them: “Only mind you — bark, then pause for a time so the others can speak their lines. Get me?”

“Very good, Comrade Commander,” answered the “dogs” and with sinister looks hid in the depths of the landowner’s garden.

On the stage everything was ready. The “White” generals and other representatives of bourgeois society were gathered in the ‘house. The window was open, the house lit up, and through the window they could be seen seated at a gathering. The priest sat right in front of the window.

“Ready!” he shouted. The curtains parted.

“Look, Vitya Torsky!” someone who could not curb his excitement bawled out.

He was shushed and the hall became still: it was at once clear from the talk (between the bourgeoisie and generals that the figure at the window, next to the skinniest of generals, was Father Yevtikhi, not Vitya Torsky at all.

From the cover of the trees, the partisans stole on to the stage. One of them was Igor Chernyavin. They crept stealthily towards the window while a number of them tried to break into the house. Two took up a position close to the window with rifles lifted, ready to fire. They fired: the most gripping moment in the play had arrived. Beyond the window, inside the house, shots, panic, shouts, the sobbing of women. The two dogs sprang from the wings, looking very much like bear-cubs, and flung themselves with angry barks on the partisans. Everybody in the audience knew that they were Begunok and Vanya, but the fight on the stage was so enthralling, and everybody was so anxious for the partisans to win, that the dogs became real dogs and even evoked ‘feelings of hostility.

Igor Chernyavin, as third partisan, with dishevelled head and scanty beard, tackled the priest.

“Got you, you pot-bellied old devil!” he cried. The unusual sight of the deep hall with its hundreds of pairs of human eyes, the flashing of gold shoulder-straps, stars and a blue ribbon, the huge cardboard cross, the frenzied dogs yapping round his legs, Vitya Torsky hissing: “Don’t take hold of the cross,”—all these so overwhelmed Igor that he suddenly found himself at a loss for his next lines. The prompter in his box was tearing his hair and giving him his cue in an angry sibilant whisper, but try as he would Igor could not remember the phrase and went on shouting: “Got you, you pot-bellied old devil!”

But this sentence suddenly lost all its sense: the priest was taken prisoner and led off. The third partisan was supposed to fall now, wounded by the shot from the thin lieutenant. The shot had long been fired offstage, the lieutenant had been sticking his revolver into Igor’s stomach for some time, but Igor was flustered and set off again with: “Got you, you fat...,”

Suddenly he heard wild laughter from the audience. At his remark, he assumed. Or, perhaps, because off the string of one of his shoes. It had started to work loose at the beginning of the battle; then Igor felt someone step on it, and now the bast shoe was coming off his foot altogether. He jerked his bare foot clear and only then remembered that he should have fallen down long before, a fact which Zorin was reminding him of by whispering: “Fall down!”

The dogs went on barking wildly, but one of them was behaving rather strangely, too: it was carrying out its duties conscientiously enough, leaping at the fallen third partisan, and had even grabbed the shoe with one of its paws, but among the canine sounds were now audible those of a real boy’s laughter. The dog was clearly making an effort to check this remarkable phenomenon, but the laughter grew and grew and finally triumphed, as the dog burst into peals of unrestrained mirth of the kind that can come only from a boy when he sees something really funny. Rocking with laughter, the dog made his exit at the run; but canine honour was preserved—he ran off on all fours.

Igor lay wounded, unable to make head or tail of what -was happening, he heard sounds of high-pitched laughter ringing out beside him, he heard the public laughing, and he thought they were all laughing at him because of his bare foot and because he had fallen down too late.

When the curtains closed Igor jumped up and ran into the wings. At the first tree, he fell upon Klava and Zakharov. They stood on their own, talking seriously about something. Igor’s heart missed a beat and he dodged aside. The idea that he ought to run away from the colony without more ado flashed through his mind, but at that moment Vitya Torsky swooped on him.

“Why did ‘you leave it there?’” he asked, handing him the shoe. “Put it on again.”

Igor remembered that his role was far from ended, with three more complicated acts of partisan life ahead. He hurried to the dressing-room, where he found general glee reigning. Vanya Galchenko, looking utterly dispirited, sat in one corner; perhaps he had even been crying for the soot on his cheeks was all smudged. Begunok was rolling about the bench beside him.

“Do you realize what happened, Vanya?” he said, through his never-ending laughter. “The dog laughed with a human voice. There’s a dog for you!”

Malenky was removing his medals. He alone offered Vanya some consolation: “Never mind, Galchenko, there’s nothing to be upset about. “A good dog always knows how to laugh, though not, perhaps, quite as loud as that....”

12

A Mysterious Incident

Zakharov’s arrival in the dressing-room put an end to Volodya Begunok’s mirth. The director went up to Vanya and lifted his chin with his warm soft hand.

“Have you ‘been crying, Galchenko?”

“He was laughing before,” said Begunok. “He’s that kind of dog. First it laughs, then it cries.”

Vanya felt downcast. He’d been so excited and happy getting ready for the performance, he’d learned to bark so well — far better than Volodya, and now here he was- disgraced for life. How could he ever face the detachment and the rest of the colony after that. And it was all Igor’s fault for having jumped out of his bast shoe and for not wanting to fall down. Sancho Zorin had just been letting Igor have it for that: “What was the matter with you? I shot you and you went on standing there like a sheep, bawling something at me! Why don’t you use your brains?”

Malenky looked at the matter good-humouredly. “Don’t be so captious, Sancho,” he said. “It’s not so easy to use one’s brains.”

“What’s there so difficult about it?” “Well, there is. Just take your own case. ‘Standing like a sheep,’ wasn’t that how you put it? What makes you think that a sheep wouldn’t fall if you shot it? You’re wrong; we don’t consider the sheep to be the most obstinate animal. I suppose you meant to say donkey.”

Malenky’s good-natured blue eyes threw Zorin into confusion.

“All right, donkey, then,” he echoed mechanically. Zorin had been so ingeniously caught out that everybody laughed. Malenky laid his hand on Zorin’s shoulder and said just as mildly:

“But don’t you see, the donkey would fall down too.” “Oh, you ...” burst out Zorin angrily. All this chatter and fun would have reduced Vanya’s sense of distress, but under Zakharov’s compassionate attention it again boiled up in him, and once more his Black Hand rose to his cheeks.

“I don’t like this, Galchenko,” said Zakharov sternly. “Nobody minds because you laughed when you were carrying out your canine duties. Situations arise in which no dog can restrain itself, not even the savagest. But for blubbing I’ve a mind to set you two punishment tasks. Volodya, go and get washed right away! Well done, Vanya! You played the dog magnificently.”

Doffing not only their dog’s attire but most of their own, too, the two boys ran off in their shorts through the park. The last drop of woe had been drained from Vanya’s soul. Begunok ran beside him, peering down the dark track and talking hurriedly.

“Forget it. Last year I trod on my aeroplane. .Three weeks work making it, and then to go and tread on it! Guess how upset I was. I lay on my pillow and started to blub. Then he came into the dorm. Huff You talk about trouble! You should’ve hoard how he shouted at me. Yes, shouted! ‘To hell with colonists like you! You’re mot a colonist, you’re nothing but a bucket of water! Take two punishment tasks!’ Oh, crikey, he was so furious when he went out. What made it worse was that Zyriansky was the commander on duty: ‘Scrub the vestibule.’¹ I scrubbed and scrubbed, then Zyriansky came and said: ‘That’s not scrubbing. You’ve just made a mess all round. Start again from the beginning. I won’t accept it like that.’ It took me three hours scrubbing. Yes, that’s how it was.”

“Didn’t you cry again afterwards? Not even once?” “What do you mean? After the punishment tasks?” “Yes.”

“Don’t be silly! Why, if he’d seen that happening he’d... why, he’d be the death of you and have you before a general meeting. Blub now! Why, I couldn’t even if I wanted to. The tears just aren’t there! Just think of it, one morning last summer I played the reveille at four o’clock in the morning—there was such a row about that! You can’t even imagine what happened! I woke everybody up. Those who had to get up earlier too. Read the clock wrong somehow. They all got up and cleaned the dorms, and then the commander on duty glanced at his watch.... Yet even then I didn’t cry.”

Begunok halted in his tracks.

“Look over there!”

Over on the left a light flashed sharply illuminating a brick wall and some people’s faces. Then it went out and flashed once more.

“It’s the storehouse,” whispered Begunok.

“What’s that?” asked Vanya.

“The place where they keep the materials for the factory. Come on.”

The boys bent down and ran on tiptoe towards the storehouse. The park had not been cleared here and there was much undergrowth; their feet sank in the soft fresh grass. They stopped on reaching the last of the bushes. Blum’s factory yard was lit by a single lamp and the brick storehouse stood in shadow beyond the stadium. There was another gleam of¹ light. Somebody was obviously striking matches.

“It’s- Ryzhikov!” Vanya whispered in alarm.

“Yes, H’s Ryzhikov all right. But who’s the other fellow? Look, look! It’s Ruslan! Of course, it’s Ruslan! They’re trying to break in! Sh-sh!”

They heard Ruslan’s tense whisper: “Leave off striking those matches! They’ll see us!”

“There’s nobody about to see us. They’re all in the theatre,” came the voice of Ryzhikov in reply.

They were busy with the lock; a faint scraping of metal could be heard.

“They’re using a skeleton key,” Begunok whispered. “They’ll clean out the place and bolt, word of honour, they will.”

Tinkering with the lock, apparently, was not such smooth going. Ryzhikov uttered an oath and looked around.

“Let’s yell,” said Begunok with his mouth right up against Vanya’s ear.

“What shall we say?”

““You know what? I’ll shout: ‘Hold that man Ryzhikov!’ Then you.. . no.... Let’s shout together, but in deep voices, mind you....”

“And then run away,”

“And then ...well, they’ll not catch us anyway.”

Vanya was so tickled by the idea that he even felt like laughing out loud.

“Listen, Volodya, oh, I’ve got such an idea. Do you know what we’ll shout. Only, don’t make a noise while I tell you. We’ll say: ‘Ryzhikov, come out into the middle!’”

“All right, only both of us at once.”

Begunok raised a finger. Then they uttered, in deep awe-striking stage voices; “Ryzhikov, come out into the middle!”

These words, marvellously distinct, filled the whole space of the factory yard, reached its walls, and then went echoing in all directions. The two at the storehouse apparently could not even make out where those terrifying words came from, for Ryzhikov and Ruslan made a dash straight for the very bushes behind which the lads were standing. Vanya and Begunok only just managed to slip to the side in time.

“Stop!” Ruslan said in a muffled whisper.

Ryzhikov stopped a bunch of skeleton keys still in his hand.

“Who was that dirty swine that shouted?” Ruslan went on in the same tremulous voice.

“Come on, let’s go to the theatre. They’ll find out about us otherwise.”

“All because of those matches of yours. I told you not to....”

They set off at a smart pace for the main building.

Begunok jumped up and down in his excitement.

“That was fine! What a lark!”

“Now we must go and tell Zyriansky,”¹ said Vanya.

“No need to. He’ll raise hell and call a general meeting if we do. And he’d say kick them out immediately.”

“Well, let him. That’s what I say!”

“You ass. They wouldn’t kick them out, anyway. Those fellows would say: ‘Where is your proof? We were just out for a stroll.’ No, they wouldn’t get kicked out. Just let us keep our eyes on them. Interesting, isn’t it? They don’t know that we know all about it.”

Next morning Igor Chernyavin woke up in a bad mood. As he lay in bed, he thought that he'd have to run away from the colony, for he felt that he just could not face having to go out into the middle over such a matter. Klava Kashirina happened to be on duty that morning, and the sight of her taking inspection was enough to remind Igor once again of the horrible incident of the previous evening. But Klava's voice had gaiety in it when, with maidenly primness, she greeted the dormitory with her "Good morning, comrades!" and she was quite lenient when she scolded Gontar for his badly polished boots, which made the culprit smile sheepishly and set the whole detachment smiting, including Igor. It was difficult not to smile: there were bright patches of sunshine on the highly polished floor, the inspection team in their parade uniforms glittered, too, while Klava's voice rang in a silvery tone, like the cornets in the band. Igor's faith in life was restored— Klava could not have been telling tales, she must have understood that a fellow can fall in love. He went off blithely for his breakfast. Many of the colonists, some even from other detachments, greeted him affably, recalling the third partisan who found it so hard to die and the gay dog. At table, Nesterenko also shone with dormant, benevolent happiness: properly speaking, the performance of the previous evening, about which there was so much talk that morning, had been the work of the eighth detachment, including even its newest member, Igor Chernyavin.

Volodya Begunok came quickly to the table, drew himself erect, and saluted.

"Comrade Chernyavin!" he said.

"What do you want?" asked Igor, looking round.

"There's a letter for you!"

At the level of his belt Begunok held a fluttering, important-looking, neat, white envelope.

"Who's it from? Are you sure it's for me?"

"Well, read the address. Look 'Comrade Igor Chernyavin.'"

"It's a local one, isn't it?"

"It is," replied Begunok with a reserved smile.

"Who's it from?"

"I expect that's written there, too."

"What on earth can this be?"

Igor opened the envelope. His table and those around grew interested. Begunok remained standing at attention, but his eyes, cheeks, lips, and even his knees wore a smile.

Igor read the brief terse lines on the large white sheet of paper: "Comrade Chernyavin. Please come and have a talk with me this evening after bedtime. A. Zakharov. Igor re-read the letter, read it a third time, and, finally, blushed. Something cold pierced him through the heart.

Sancho Zorin rose to his feet, glanced at the letter, and laid his hand on Igor's shoulder: "Well, Chernyavin, I shouldn't like to be in your shoes."

Igor felt a still chillier sensation gripping his breast. Without putting down his glass of tea, Nesterenko stretched out his free hand for the letter, and read it:

"I see," he said. "Do you know what it's about?"

Begunok's smile faded.

"Clear, isn't it?" he said.

"Buzz off, Volodka!" said Nesterenko, casting him a look of ire.

"Very good, Comrade Commander!"

But as he left them, Begunok threw at Igor and the rest of the eighth detachment a teasing look that was full of meaning. "Do you know what it's about?" repeated Nesterenko.

Igor dropped into his chair, looking at Gontar in alarm.

"It's—er—it's probably about that—er—girl."

"Oho! A girl, eh? Well, we're listening!"

In low tones, so that the other tables should not hear, stammering and groping for words, blushing and paling Igor related the unfortunate incident that had taken place in the park on the previous evening.

"And that was all," he ended.

Nesterenko pondered for a short time.

"You'll get it hot," he commented. "For things like that Alexei's—oh, he's very hard!"

From the very first words of Igor's story, Gontar had been staring at him with narrowed scornful eyes; now he leant nearer, out of hearing of the other tables, and blurted into his face:

"You see what a reptile you are? You're not worth that girl's little finger. It's just too bad that Alexei's sent for you! I'd have had my hands on you!"

Nesterenko and Zorin added nothing to that, probably of one mind with Gontar that Chernyavin was a reptile, and that he deserved rough treatment.

Igor bent over his plate.

"To hell with him! I'm clearing out."

Nesterenko leaned back in his chair, pensively twiddling his fingers on some bread-crumbs.

"Oh no, you won't. Alexei knows that if there was a danger of your running away he wouldn't have written to you but would have sent for you with the commander on duty."

"Who do you think is going to let you run away?" exclaimed Gontar, in the same scornful tone. "Do you think the detachment would let you? You'd better drop that idea."

After breakfast Igor wandered about, the park in anguish paced the yard and the corridor. He counted on meeting Zakharov and speaking to him. But Zakharov did not leave his office where people kept on going to see him: first Slum, then the book-keeper, then Malenky, followed by a caller from the town, then Klava. Klava took no notice of Igor at all.

Along the paths of the flower-garden walked Vanya. Begunok dashed at him from behind and seized him with both arms. They wrestled for a moment, then Begunok whispered: "Do you know what's happened? Chernyavin's been called to the office... to Alexei. . . tonight, in the office. Oh, he's going to catch it! Do you know what he did? He kissed that—er—you know, that Oksana girl!"

"Kissed her?"

"Yes, three times, in the park!"

"Just kissed her! And that's all?"

"Isn't that enough for you? Don't you know it's strictly forbidden? Why, you catch it for kissing just once! But for three times! ..."

"What'll happen to him?"

"I shouldn't like to be in his shoes!"

Igor managed to catch Zakharov in the corridor of the main building. The director was walking at a stroll, apparently taking a rest. He replied politely to Igor's salute:

"Good morning, Chernyavin." But he did not stop and gave no indication of being, as you might say, in correspondence with Igor.

"I received your note, Alexei Stepanovich. Couldn't you see me now?"

"Why now?—I asked you to come this evening. . . ." "Well, you see, it would be—er—more convenient now."

"And for me it'll be more convenient this evening." So back Igor went to his roaming in the park, in the yard, in the Quiet Room. He did not want to run away. It would be ignoble to run away: fancy running away after getting such a polite letter. Soothing thoughts ran through his mind: what could Zakharov do to him? He couldn't detain him because that could only happen to full-fledged colonists. Punishment tasks? He'd take ten of them with pleasure. They were nonsense. Consoling thoughts came in plenty, but though they were convincing, for some reason they didn't bring consolation. There was still much to come before "bedtime"—first dinner, then a spell of work in the assembly-shop, then supper, then two hours free time, then the commanders' reports, and only then the "bedtime" signal. This bugle-call, so beautifully calm and peaceful, now loomed ahead like something fearful. And the words of the call, which the colonists often used to sing quietly when they heard the bugle:

Time to sleep, time to sleep, colonists. The day is done, the work is done, and good night ...those words were not at all appropriate to what Igor was expecting after the call.

During dinner the colonists left Igor to himself, for which he was thankful: the situation had grown clearer, he no longer felt like making excuses and defending-himself. All he wanted was to get everything over and done 'with as soon as possible.

But after work the entire detachment took part in a discussion on the affair. Rogov had the most to say. There was special weight attached to his words, because he added nothing to them in the way of gesture and was neither angry nor contemptuous.

"You'll 'get hell for it. You deserve it, too. Oksana's a farm-hand, that you ought to realize, while you sit here with everything served up for you; and yet' you creep about with your kisses... of course you're a swine!"

in the evening, long after supper had been forgotten, and when Nesterenko had returned from reporting, and Begunok was wandering about the yard with his bugle ready, the attitude towards Igor 'became more friendly and easy. At last the bugle sounded. Zorin went up 'to Igor:

"Well, get ready, Chernyavin."

"I hope you've thought everything over thoroughly," said Nesterenko slowly, patting the table with the palm of his hand.

Igor maintained a melancholy silence. Zorin took him by the belt: "Keep your chin up, chum. Alexei's a splendid chap; you feel as fine as if you've been to the baths after you've seen him."

"We'll see him off, Sancho, shall we?" said Nesterenko.

The three of them went down. Vanya Galchenko, whom they saw sitting in the vestibule, smiled at them. He watched them pass along the corridor towards the office, and then ran after her. There was nobody in the Commanders' Council room. The office door opened and through it came Blum and Begunok.

"Go in now, Chernyavin," said Begunok.

Igor walked towards the door.

"Is he angry?"

"Oh! Terribly! Honestly, there are flames coming-out of his nostrils and smoke from his ears!"

Begunok pulled a terrible face and stamped his foot. Both Blum and Zorin burst out laughing, but Vanya was quite prepared to accept the news in earnest. Nesterenko raised his hand: "Go, my son, with my blessing."

Igor opened the door.

Zakharov was sitting at his desk. He beckoned Igor to a chair with a nod.

"Sit down."

Igor sat, holding his breath. Zakharov left his papers-and rubbed his forehead with one hand.

"Do I have to say anything or do you understand it all for yourself?"

Igor sprang 'to his feet, placed his hand over his-heart, then, feeling ashamed of this gesture, let his arm drop.

"I understand it all, Alexei Stepanovich.... Forgive-me!"

Zakharov looked Igor in the eyes, calmly and attentively. Then he spoke slowly, rather sternly:

"So you understand it all? Good. I thought you were a man of honour. You'll take all the necessary steps tomorrow, then?"

"I shall," answered Igor in a low voice.

"How are you going to set about it?"

"I ...er—don't know. I shall beg Oksana to—to forgive me."

"I see.... Well, that's all right then. Good night. You may go."

Feeling as if he had shed a heavy burden, Igor saluted, went quickly to the door, and stopped:

"Shall I report to you afterwards, Alexei Stepanovich?"

"No, I don't see why you should...' You see, I know you'll do what you said you would. There's no need to report."

Igor raised his hand to his brow, dropping it only when he was back in the Commanders' Council room. They all looked at him there in expectation, but he behaved as if he did not notice them.

"Well, how did it go? Come on, tell us!" shouted Vanya.

Nesterenko scrutinized Igor.

"Turned you inside out, eh?" he commented.

Igor jerked his head.

"What a man! I must say...."

Then he stood still, astonished, in the middle of the room.

"Do you know, he didn't say a thing to me?"

"And what about you? Did you say anything?"

"Yes, I told him everything."

"That's good, as long as you talked sense."

"You know, I talked fairly sensibly."

Zorin's eyes gleamed.

"He's right! Why is that, Comrades? I've noticed it myself: we're such ordinary people as a rule, but once we get into the office we suddenly seem to become more sensible. There must be something about the walls there!"

"Yes, I expect it's the walls," agreed Nesterenko with arch good humour.

14

There is a letter for you

August came with its serene evenings and apples for dessert on holidays. The colonists moved into new dormitories, more spacious than the old ones. Vanya's dormitory neighbour was now his new friend Filka Shary. They made friends while working in the foundry, though their characters had little in common.

Shary was very much a man of action who knew his own worth and was convinced that one day he would-be a film-actor. He was, above all, extremely mischievous. He had no doubt at all that the main thing in life was adventure, as intricate and daring as possible. But Shary had spent five years in the colony, ever since he was eight years old, and was one of its small band of veterans, being listed as eleventh among them. This circumstance, though a constant "source of pride to him, at the same time tended to handicap Shary in the pursuit of his natural leanings towards mischief-making. He could

not see himself standing “out in the middle” explaining himself to some lot of new boys who had really seen nothing in their lives: they hadn’t seen the bare field where the colony now stood, or lived in wooden Huts, or toiled in the potato fields, or witnessed the creation of the band, where Shary played first cornet.

For all that Filka still went on making mischief, but with great respect for that limit beyond which mischief ceased to be permissible and became, so to speak, liable to lead to the “middle.” For the “middle” was the only thing Filka was afraid of. He had no great fear of Zakharov. He liked talking to him, always got into an argument, and defended himself to the last ditch, surrendering only when Zakharov said: “I see. So you don’t agree with me! Let’s put the matter before a general meeting.”

Zakharov saw through Shary, but Shary saw through Zakharov too. Shary fully realized that he had right on his side ‘but that Zakharov, being the’ director, could lay the question before a general meeting. So he would look at Zakharov sullenly, firmly withholding any response to his smile, and then say, in his deep alto voice:

“There you are! You always want to let the general meeting decide. You yourself have the right to punish me—that’s all.”

Zakharov, of course, strikes a pose:

“Why, you’re an-old colonist. How can I punish you if you think you’re right? ‘Let’s put it to the general meeting.’”

Then ‘Shary turns away and ruminates. But what’s the good of ruminating when you know that, in any case, the general meeting will take Zakharov’s side. So Shary finally surrenders:

“I didn’t say I was right, did I?” he expostulates.

“It seems to me you did.”

“I said nothing of the sort. Of course I’m wrong.”

“Yet you argued for half an hour.”

“What do you mean, half an hour? Five minutes perhaps.”

“All right. You’ll get one hour’s detention for spilling water in the corridor and one hour for arguing though you-acknowledged you were guilty all the time.”

Shary frowns. But one can’t swim against the tide and, though his brows remain bent, his arm comes up in a salute.

“Very good, Comrade Director. One hour’s detention plus another hour’s detention.”

Zakharov, who detects a hint of disapproval of his behaviour in this unusual formulation, nevertheless goes on smiling:

“You may go.”

Balked, Shary takes his time in ‘turning round and walks very slowly to the door. Zakharov is given one more opportunity of seeing that Shary denies the fairness of such treatment.

On the day off or on a free evening, Shary hands his narrow black belt to the commander on duty and stands before Zakharov’s desk.

“I’ve come for my detention.”

Shary's brow is furrowed in frown, his lips are twitching a little, but there is a smile in his eyes.

"Thank you," says Zakharov.

Shary sits down on the settee and picks up the current issue of *Ogonyok* (*A popular illustrated family magazine*). He is feeling sorry that there is not a cameraman present to take a splendid shot of "Shary detained." But this regret is purely aesthetic, for, as a matter of fact, Shary is very fond of the colony's long-established tradition according to which it is considered improper to conduct any sort of argument or beg for forgiveness, once the punishment has been imposed and accepted. Zakharov too respects this tradition and never offers Shary his freedom before the time is up. He does not want Shary to be accused by his comrades of having "cried for quarter."

Thus it comes about that Shary and the director find themselves in the same 'frame of mind during the serving of the sentence. They are able to spend the two hours in each other's company in complete harmony. Their peaceful relations are in full accord with the rule which prohibits the person being detained, from talking to anyone but the director. They converse with each other about one thing and another — about the foundry, Blum, the new building, detachment affairs, and about the international situation too. Sitting on the settee with crossed legs and thumbing through the magazine, Shary airs his opinion on all these subjects; ticklish questions concerning himself he does not raise. Such questions exist, and Shary's point of view on them does not always coincide with Zakharov's. The matter of the drama circle, for instance. How comes it that actors like Chernyavin and Zorin are chosen to play roles of partisans and lieutenants while Shary is occasionally offered that of a Young Pioneer and more often than not no role at all, simply being told to grow up a little? Fancy him, Filka Shary, being told he needs to grow up, when two years ago he went to Moscow without permission to see the director of a film studio. The director, it is true, had also told him to "grow up." Besides that, on his return Filka had been made to stand out in the "middle" and Zyriansky had been strongly against him being taken back into the colony. But all the same ... all the same, Shary could really act and didn't just walk the stage and echo the prompter.

Shary had made friends with Vanya because he taught him his craft as a core-maker, and because Vanya was a new boy who respected Shary's authority both as a colonist and an actor. Shary condescendingly forgave him his appearance in the role of a dog; well, for a new boy that was a good role. But just let them try and offer a part like that to Filka Shary! - In the foundry the battle with the smoke went on. In spite of all Slum's attempts to wriggle out of the matter it ended up in a row. At an emergency Commanders' Council convened during the dinner-break Zyriansky proposed:

"Decision: as long as there is no ventilation system the younger boys working in the foundry are to be laid off. Just that and nothing more!"

"What do you mean? Laid off! Laid off! What on earth are you talking about? Who is going to make the cores?" shouted Blum.

"Whatever you say they must be laid off. Let Nesterenko, Sinitsyn and Kjuksov go on suffering, but take the kids off the job."

And despite all Blum's wheedling, his promises and his touchiness, the Commanders' Council adopted the decision to free the kids at once from work in the foundry. Blum ran

off immediately to Zakharov's office, waited patiently until the visitors had dispersed, and, when he was alone with Zakharov, asked him reproachfully, "How can you keep quiet like that? Now they've gone and taken a decision. Well, what do we do next?"

"I'm keeping quiet now, too, Solomon Davidovich."

"Well what?"

"Well nothing."

"Of course, speech is silver and silence is golden, that I know, but it's not right to keep quiet when a few kids are ruining a really big business."

Torsky came in with a sheet of paper.

"Here's the order about laying off the core-makers." Zakharov signed it in silence. Torsky winked at Slum and went out.

"Do you mean to say you've signed it?" Blum shrieked.

"I have."

"You mean the core-makers are to be laid off?"

He dashed out without waiting for the answer. Past the sentry, along the path through the flower-beds, past the stadium and the forge, he panted on, slammed the metal-bound door of the machine-shop and burst into Volonchuk's office: "Where's the vent. Comrade Volonchuk?"

"What vent?"

"What do you mean; 'what vent'? For the damned ventilation system!"

"I've not got any iron for that!"

"No iron! Do you expect me to find iron for you?"

"I'd have found it myself but there ain't none."

Blum bounced up and down in front of Volonchuk.

"No iron, did you say?" he raged. "You come along with me and I'll show you your iron."

Volonchuk opened his lack-lustre eyes with surprise,

"Come on!" Blum shrieked.

He hurtled at whirlwind speed through the yard. Though striding two metres at a time, Volonchuk could not keep up with him. At a corner of the machine-shop dangled the lower part of a gutter pipe. As he ran, Blum turned to Volonchuk and pointed to it:

"Isn't that iron for you?"

By the time Volonchuk had leisurely examined the piece of iron and made up his mind to look at Blum, the latter was far away. Volonchuk again set off with his long strides.

For some time a piece of iron sheeting on the roof of an old shed had been rolled back by a storm. It was at this sheet that Blum pointed next.

"Isn't that iron for you?" he bellowed angrily.

And Volonchuk looked just as lethargically at this piece of iron, raising no objection because it really was iron.

Finally, Blum ran up to a heap of scrap. On top lay a rusty burned-out 'discarded iron stove. Blum tapped its side with his finger and enquired sarcastically: "I suppose you'll tell me that's not iron!"

Volonchuk raised his eyes to the stove, and froze into immobility. The outraged Blum had long ago disappeared into the depths of the stadium, but Volonchuk went on standing and staring. Then he looked in the direction his chief had dashed off, spat angrily, and returned his gaze to the stove. It was thus that Vitya Torsky found him when he passed that way.

"What are you doing here Comrade Volonchuk?" he asked.

Without turning, Volonchuk shook his head *and* said with a pessimistic smile: "I've 'been told that this scrap is the iron I need."

Torsky laughed and went on his way.

Blum flew in turn through the assembly- shop, the -machine-shop, the dressmaking-shop, and the other shops, handing out the necessary instructions, arguing and snapping back, but now he was happy, witty, and full of bounce. In the same high spirits -he completed the round by dashing into the Commanders' Council room; sweating and panting, he collapsed on the bench, placed his hands on his stomach and said to Torsky: "You can cancel your orders. What kind of people have we got working here, I should like to know? They suddenly start saying today there's no iron for the ventilation system. Well, I've shown them enough iron to be found for a hundred of "em."

Torsky cocked one eyebrow, but Blum had already rushed away.

Blum was in a good mood that evening. He busied himself actively in his office, thumbing through orders and instructions and making certain calculations. Bankovsky, foreman of the foundry-shop, arrived and "stood at the door.

"How many castings today?" Blum asked him vigorously.

"Four hundred oil-cans."

"Why so 'few?"

"Well, you won't get any at all tomorrow."

"What d'you mean?"

"The core-makers knocked off today. Said something about orders. And they said "they weren't coming tomorrow."

"Oh, those core-makers! All sorts of Galchenkos and Malchenkos! Why, they're only .kids. Can't you just talk to them?"

"You try and talk to them yourself! I'm telling you, you won't get a single core tomorrow!"

"Can't you make them yourself?"

"What else do you expect me to do? I'm foreman and chief of the shop and foundry man... and you want me to be a core-maker, too. Thanks very much. Don't forget the drum's mine."

"You can calmly say *auf Wiedersehen* to that drum."

"How d'you make that out?"

“Simply this: tomorrow I’m going to value your drum as scrap and pay you fifteen per cent.”

“Solomon Davidovich!”

“Open the foundry! The core-makers will come now.”

Blum knew where to go; he addressed himself directly to the fourth detachment, he found Shary in their dormitory and said to him:

“Now, you understand it’s your money and your factory, not mine. Maybe you think that you core-makers don’t matter much. That’s not so. You left the job today, and tomorrow there won’t be any castings and the foundry workers will stop, and the turners and the nickel-platers and the packers too. As a result we’ll be easily a thousand oil-cans short; that means one thousand machines without oil-cans, and the loss of five hundred roubles clear profit to us. Surely you understand that!”

“I understand all right.”

“Well, look here, you’re a decent chap. Get hold of Kravchuk, Novak, Semyon and a few others, and go to the foundry.”

“But what about that order?”

“Oh, never mind that! We’re not casting now, there’s no smoke, and nobody’s working there. You can manage a thousand cores before bedtime.”

“All the same, there’s that order.”

“Oh, you...,”

But Blum won Shary over. Half an hour later the foundry door opened and into the empty shop came Blum, Shary, Vanya Galchenko, Kravchuk, and Kiryusha Novak. Filka didn’t manage to find the rest.

“Did anybody see you?” Blum asked them quietly when they were inside.

“Nobody,” Shary replied in a whisper.

The core-makers set to work at once. Except for the dull thuds of the mallets on the sand there was no other sound to be heard for nobody spoke. But an hour later the door was flung open and bare-legged Begunok appeared on the threshold.

“Comrade Colonists! Listen to the colony director’s order!”

Blum pulled a wry face and gesticulated at Begunok: “What’s all this about an order? Tell us later on. Can’t you see people are busy?”

Begunok shook his head:

“Hey now! This is a serious matter. Comrades Shary, Galchenko, Kravchuk and Novak, consider yourselves all under arrest immediately and ‘act accordingly.’”

“Oh, hell!” exclaimed Shary, his heart sinking within him. “For how long?”

“Until the general meeting!”

All four froze with horror. Somebody dropped a mallet.

“I told you so!” said Shary, looking askance at Blum.

“Come along, comrades,” said Begunok seriously, making way for them.

The four of them filed out in silence. At the doorstep Begunok narrowed his eyes at Blum and then left too. ‘

“What a horrid little boy!” said Blum.

15

4,000 Revs. a Minute

A serious view was taken of the affair. The four accused were made to come out into the middle of the floor without their belts, a sign that they were considered as being under arrest.

Before that they had spent two painful hours sitting in Zakharov’s office. Several times commander on duty Nesterenko came in, said something to Zakharov in a low voice, and then left without even looking at the boys in detention. As a rule this period between supper-time and reporting found the office and the Commanders’ Council room at their busiest. But now, as if by arrangement, hardly anybody came to the office, and if someone did come it was strictly official business. Zakharov too was not his usual self: he kept on jotting things down, turning pages over, making calculations, scarcely raising his eyes when people came in and muttering: “Very well,” and “That’s all. You may go!”

During the whole time he did not say one word to the .detained boys. But he asked Begunok to fetch Blum immediately. And Begunok somehow gave special significance to his whispered reply.

It was a crushed and red-faced Blum that arrived. He avoided looking at the four boys, sat down and immediately took a large handkerchief from his pocket, for he was dripping with perspiration.

“I am having the foundry closed for a week, Comrade Blum,” Zakharov said to him tersely. “I have already placed an order with Kustpnitnsoyuz (*Handicraft Industries Co-operative*) for ten thousand oil-cans cast from our material and to our specifications.”

“My God! What price are you paying?” asked Blum in a hoarse voice.

“Two roubles, including our delivery costs.” “My God! My God!” exclaimed Blum as he rose and came up to Zakharov’s desk. “What a loss! We can do them for sixty kopeks!”

“I have given instructions to the packers to start at once sending the forms and raw material to town.” “But we can have the ventilation fixed up in a couple of days! And you’re closing the place down for a week!”

“I am reckoning this way: during the first three days you -will be installing the ventilation system. I am quite certain that the work will foe badly done and that I won’t approve of it. Then in the next four days the ventilation will be installed by an engineer whom I shall get from town.”

“In that case I am leaving, Alexei Stepanovich.” “Where for?”

“Leaving here altogether.”

“I was always afraid that would happen but now I no longer feel alarmed about it.”

Blum stopped mopping his perspiration and his hand, clutching his big handkerchief, froze over his bald pate. Suddenly he took offence, started dashing up and down the office and exclaimed huskily:

“So that’s how it is? In other words Blum can go to hell, then everything will be plain sailing. You think Blum’s past running your mangy factory. The fact, that Slum’s current account contains 300,000 roubles is not worth a brass farthing to you. You’re asking in an engineer who’ll spend everything on your ventilation system and all sorts of knick-knacks. Mind you, I’m not against ventilation, though plenty of people worked without it before that doctor of yours invented foundry fever. Just you show me anybody in the colony who’s got fever, besides the doctor himself. So now we’re going to install ventilation, are we, although before a year’s gone by we shall be pulling down the foundry.”

And on and on he went. Zakharov heard him out, his head bent over his papers, heard him until Blum was simply exhausted.

“I know you have the interests of the colony close to your heart, Solomon Davidovich. I know you’re a good sort. So please carry out my instructions. That’s all”

“All?” retorted Blum, waving his short arms. “Of course it’s all, but you can’t say it’s not a great deal for a man of my age to bear!”

“It’s the Soviet norm,” said Zakharov with a nod.

“A fine norm, indeed!” Blum, in the absence of other witnesses, addressed himself to the bench.

Its quartette of occupants sat there bolt upright. Shary alone brought to bear on Zakharov a fixed look conveying his disapproval. The others kept their eyes on Zakharov too, ‘but simply because they were hypnotized by everything that was going on and sadly and submissively awaited further developments. Kravchuk’s curly forelock now stood up on end on his brow. Novak’s round ox-eyed face, shone with tearful grief. AH wore the overalls they were dressed in when the calamity occurred.

Blum went away sadly.

“I hope,” he said on leaving, “that I may be allowed to absent myself from this evening’s—er—general meeting.”

“You may.”

Nesterenko looked in.

“Are you ready for the reports, Alexei Stepanovich?” “Carry on.”

A moment later a short three-note bugle-call was heard outside the windows. In a minute’s time the eleven commanders and the Sanitary Commission monitor gathered. They formed a line before Zakharov’s desk. Shary tugged Vanya by the sleeve and all the culprits too rose to their feet. The commanders came up to Zakharov in turn and saluted as they reported:

“Everything’s in order in the first detachment!

“Everything’s in order in the second detachment,!”

But Zyriansky could not say that. He looked grave and worried as he stood in line and no less so when he approached Zakharov and said: "I have to report a serious breach of discipline in the fourth detachment: colonists Shary, Klavchuk, Novak and probationer Galchenko disregarded a colony order and went to work in the foundry this evening. On your instructions they are to be brought before a general meeting."

Zakharov listened to this report in the same calm manner as he had heard the others; and again he raised his arm in salute and answered quietly:

"Very good."

Commander on duty Nesterenko repeated Zyriansky's report word for word.

"Carry on with the meeting," said Zakharov when he had received all the reports.

Bugler Begunok ran out of the office, followed by the commanders.

The signal summoning a general meeting was, always played three times: at the main building, in the factory yard and in the park. Then Begunok returned to the main building where he played only the final phrase of the whole call. By then Victor Torsky was usually opening the meeting. For this reason the colonists made a habit of coming to the meeting at the double so as not to be left outside the door in the passage. Most of them, would gather in the Quiet Room 'before the signal.

Vanya Galchenko and his comrades, seated on the settee in the office, listened sorrowfully to the familiar sequence of sounds. They heard the footsteps echoing in the corridor and their sad submissive eyes followed Zakharov as he too went to the meeting. They had no right now to enter the Quiet Room and take their place among their comrades; they had to be conducted there by the commander on duty.

It grew quiet. Torsky must *be* opening the meeting. Kravchuk heaved a sigh: "We're in for it!"

There was no response. Novak hurriedly pulled out a handkerchief, blew his nose and gazed at the ceiling.

Another five minutes passed. A burst of laughter came from the Quiet Room. Shary stole a glance in that direction; in that laughter he detected a grain of hope. They had to wait another ten minutes before Nesterenko' poked his head into the room.

"This way, please ..." he said.

Filka examined Nesterenko's face: it gave away nothing, it was stony with official urbanity.

They filed into the Quiet Room. Nesterenko led them straight into the middle of the room. In the general silence someone said: "Working folk! Look at their overalls!"

Laughter spread quickly and lightly, more like a sigh than a sound. Then it grew quiet again and Shary realized that things were going to be bad.

Torsky began with a calm that hurt: "I call on colonists Shary, Kravchuk and Novak and on probationer Galchenko to explain why they did not obey orders and went to work in the shop. It's no good telling us how Solomon Davidovich talked you over and how you flapped your ears at him. We *know* all about that. Keep to the main point: how did you dare to disobey a colony order? An order which you heard standing to attention, as usual here. You, Filka, as a veteran colonist, number eleven on the list, you speak first."

But before Filka could open his mouth Vladimir Kolos asked to be heard.

"I think we ought to make one thing clear, comrades. Disobeying an order within an hour of it being given—not just one fellow but a whole gang of them—that's a really serious matter, we all know that. The least they can get as punishment is to be deprived of the title of colonist and made probationers again. We used to expel people for such things, didn't we?"

"Yes, we did..." came from most of the meeting.

"But the question is who's responsible?" continued Kolos. "We've got Vanya Galchenko, who's only been in the colony a couple of months. He's not responsible. He ought to be 'freed straightaway and not considered guilty at all. With him there were three colonists of whom Shary is the oldest. But we ought to have my friend Alexei Zyriansky, the commander of the fourth detachment, out in the middle."

Kolos resumed his seat— His speech created a sensation. The room grew so quiet that the boys in the middle could hear breathing. Zyriansky was sitting on the steps right up at the platform with his head down. The chairman did not know how to deal with Kolos's proposal. He looked around the room, cast a glance of alarm in Zakharov's direction and obviously playing for time, and said: "The question of Vanya Galchenko has been correctly formulated. He ought to be set free at once. Any objections?"

Nobody raised his voice. Nobody worried about Vanya Galchenko at the moment. After all he was a newcomer.

"Comrade Nesterenko! Vanya Galchenko may leave the floor. Off you go, Vanya!"

Vanya realized that he had been cleared of blame, but, strange to say, he didn't feel happy about it. As he left the floor he looked back into the middle of the room; where he was leaving his three comrades. He recalled that he had to wait two more months to get the title of colonist. Lida Talikova tugged at his arm: "Come away while you're safe, Vanya!"

She made him sit beside her. Remembering her from that wonderful day when he had first entered the colony, he smiled his gratitude at her. Then his eyes went back to the middle: Shary was speaking, loudly, with injured pride in his voice: "Kolos's proposal is all wrong. Wrong, I say! Alyosha ought not to be put in the middle. Let him be answerable in the Commanders' Council, or let him speak from where he's sitting, but you can't have him out in the middle. I'll answer for myself and so will Novak and Kravchuik. We're guilty all right, but the question is in what degree. It would have been a different matter if we'd gone there in our own interests. We went there for the colony's sake though. Do you know why? Because there wasn't a single core ready for tomorrow! We didn't understand the order, we thought it only applied when there were fumes, and in the evening there weren't any and we thought, well, we thought it would be all right to go there...."

Filka was listened to seriously, but without evoking one sound of approval. He completed his speech, frowned, looked around, and heaved a sigh.

The colonists were not to be easily misled by cunning words as Shary was soon to learn. There were speeches by seniors and by juniors, by commanders and by rank-and-file colonists. In no time Filka was hearing many things about which he only allowed

himself to think in strict secrecy: "Filka's behaving appallingly at this general meeting. Yes, appallingly, I say, there's no need to look surprised about it. The main thing is that he's lying, lying to a general meeting. He's spent five years at the colony and tells us he did not understand an order. If that was so why did they sneak off to work? Why didn't they say anything about it to the commander on duty? When has it ever happened here that kids have gone to work in the evening?"

"Filka's an individualist. We've known that for a long time. Only he's a sly one, so he wiggles out of everything. Alexei Stepanovich has a weakness for him too: he puts him under detention often enough but this is the first time in two years he's been brought before a general meeting."

"Just look at Filka! A film-actor, aye? But when it comes to playing the dog—huh, a famous actor like me taking a part like that! He wants to play the chief Bolshevik. And what sort of Bolshevik is he, I'd like to know? Says he didn't understand the order! Let Jean Griffé tell us what he's like in the band. Come on, Griffé."

So Jean Griffé spoke. He really did look like a Frenchman but all the colony knew he used to be plain Ivan Gribov, though that could not be proved, so he stayed Jean Griffé, and that was that. Dark, lean, elegant, he was cut out to be the conductor of an orchestra some day.

"Filka doesn't break the rules in the band but sometimes we notice that the first cornet has stopped playing. And the reason is that Filka feels he's been offended because Fomin's been given the solo part instead of him. And how are you supposed to know it? He sits there holding his cornet and even puffing out his cheeks as if he's really playing. Or things like this happen. We went to play at a concert in the Medical Institute. Filka tells us he has a pain in the chest, mark you—oh, his chest aches so—he just couldn't play! There wasn't anybody to take his place: he has one phrase, you remember, that one in Lysenko's 'Mayfly.' And there he is with a pain in the chest. Nothing for it but, to call a doctor, you'd think. It was good luck I guessed what was wrong and changed his place. Then I ask him: Going to play? All right, he says, I'll bear it somehow—and he even pulls a face as if he's really in pain. And the only thing wrong with him is that the place doesn't suit him because the pretty fellow can't show himself off to the public in it."

Filka Shary's eyes bored deep into the parquet floor, he twiddled his fingers and squinted his eyes: he hadn't expected Jean Griffé to say such things—as- if he cared a damn about the public!

Komsomol secretary Mark Grinhaus rose: "I don't think we ought to put Zyriansky under the chandelier. He's a good commander and a fine colonist. In such cases he should answer for his detachment in the Commanders' Council or to the Komsomol, but on no account ought the commander to be put in the middle, Kolos went too far over that; it's never happened here. When we've had commanders out it's only been for matters involving them personally." »

"Has anybody anything else to say about Zyriansky?" asked Torsky. "If not, I shall pass on to the voting."

Only two hands were raised in favour of Zyriansky being put in the middle. Shary heaved a loud sigh—his worst fears were over.

Then Zakharov spoke. He spoke from his place, standing with his hands on the back of Begunok's chair. There was a persuasive warmth in his words even when they were stern ones. Shary turned his head towards him and did not take his eyes off him till he had finished speaking: this was no occasion for disagreeing with Zakharov. Some parts of the speech, indeed, were altogether to Filka's liking. For instance:

"The First of May Colony has been in existence nearly seven years. Like you, I am proud of our colony. Our collective has great strength and lots of intelligence. Our future is rosy. At the present time we have 300,000 roubles to our current account. We shall be helped by the state because we deserve help. We love our state and are honestly doing what our country requires us to do: learning to live like real Soviet people. Before long we shall begin to build our new factory.

"It is always a matter of pride to me that together we came through the hard times with honours, times when there was not enough bread, when now and then we had to pick lice out of our clothes, when we did not know how to live the real way. We came, through with flying colours because we trusted each other, because we were disciplined.. .. There are some folk among us who consider discipline to be a very fine and pleasant thing—but only as long as it stays pleasant and agreeable. That's nonsense! There is no such discipline. Any fool can do something pleasant. You've got to know how to do things that are unpleasant, onerous, difficult. How many people have we got who can do that, real people, I mean?"

Zakharov's pause demanded a reply. And someone cried out impulsively: "There are plenty of 'em, Alexei Stepanovich!"

Zakharov could no longer maintain his tense grave manner and as he looked towards the speaker his characteristic childlike smile spread over his face.

"Well, of course you're right: we do have plenty of folk like that, but—just look there"—he glanced into the middle of the room—"what about those fellows there? What are we to think about them? Are they all right or are they a bad lot? Three of them, Novak, Kravchuk and Shary. They've been condemned much too severely here; they've been called individualists even. That's not just. Filka isn't a individualist, he's a right-minded, hard-working fellow who is devoted to our-colony. So what's the matter with him? The trouble is that these colonists started to play the fool with discipline. They think discipline's a jolly game which you can either play or not play—they heard the order, ignored it, and went to work. Tell me, please, Comrade Colonists: can you play the fool with a turning-lathe?"

"You just try!" someone shouted.

"No, of course you can't fool about with it! You can't put your nose or hand under the cutter instead of a detail. And let somebody from the machine-shop tell us whether you can play the fool with a band saw or a circular saw? Or with a dovetailing machine like the one Ruslan Gorokhov works on? What's your opinion, Ruslan?"

The colour rushed to Ruslan's pimpled face; he was embarrassed but pleased by the question.

"Some joke! With the spindle at 4,000 revs!" "Well, you see! But you can play the fool with discipline, eh? Quite wrong! Our discipline ought to be as hard as iron, serious discipline,-Stalin discipline. Do you agree with me?"

The colonists suddenly broke into applause; wreathed in smiles they looked at Zakharov with eyes that were fired with inspiration. They had no doubts about what kind of discipline theirs was.

“Our country needs discipline,” continued Zakharov, “because we are doing wonderfully heroic work and because we are surrounded by enemies whom we’ll certainly have to fight some day. You ought to leave the colony as people who have been tempered like steel and who know what value to set on discipline. Now what about Filka? I like Filka very much, though he is always ready to argue with me. You see, after all, I don’t turn at 4,000 revs a minute.”

Again there was a loud voice in the crowd: “Oh, don’t you?”

Everybody burst out laughing. Even those who stood in the middle could not resist smiling. Zakharov adjusted his pince-nez.

“A general meeting is a serious occasion. You Comrade Shary, and you Comrade Kravchuk, and you Comrade Novak ought to be given a good lesson that you shouldn’t play the fool.”

Vitya Torsky came to the voting:

“We have only one motion before us, a proposal to deprive them of their title of colonist. The question is for how long? I suggest three months. You can say your last word, Comrade Shary.”

“Alexei Stepanovich was right when he said that you can’t approach discipline the way we did,” Shary said. “You’ll see that it won’t happen to me again. It won’t, whether you punish me or not. My opinion is that you can do without the punishment. I’m not a new boy, after all. There should be no question of depriving me of my badge for a few months. It’s not a matter of how many months I should go without my badge. After all, I’ve been a colonist for five years. That’s how I feel about it.”

“And what do you think, Comrade Novak?”

“I think that way too.”

Throughout the meeting Petka Kravchuk had been standing with his eyes averted, his eyelashes quivering, looking occasionally at the chairman and heaving imperceptible sighs. His expression reflected a sensible philosophical submission to his fate; in spirit he was wholly on the side of the meeting, but the tide of circumstances had swept him into the middle and he was prepared to endure the test bravely.

“I’ll take whatever you decide,” Kravchuk said.

“So there’s only one motion,” said Torsky. “I have another to propose,” a voice rang out.

“Go ahead.”

Commander of the tenth detachment Ilya Rudnev rose. He was the colony’s youngest commander: “It’s a very heavy blow for an old colonist like Filka to lose his badge. His offence was a serious one, but he didn’t do anything dishonourable. On the other hand he oughtn’t to go unpunished. That would be bad for him and for everybody else too. We fellows—er—like it when the screw’s tightened. I was like that too not long ago. Besides that, we’re not dealing with a trifle—they disobeyed an order. Such a thing hasn’t

happened in all the three years I've been in the colony. It's not as if the three of them, Filka, Kiryusha and Petya were kids, after all they're thirteen years old and all of them colonists. They all ought to get it hot. I propose they be cautioned before a general parade."

Rudnev grew a little red in the face as he spoke for he was not yet accustomed to the authority attached to his rank. He spoke quietly in cultivated terms, softening the most categorical of his phrases with a smile. The meeting voiced its approval.

Torsky then put to the vote the question whether the boys should be punished or not. There was unanimity in favour of them being punished. The second question was whether the punishment should be the same for all. It was decided unanimously that it should be. Then the proposal to deprive them of their colonist badges was voted on; it got the support of only 65 votes. Finally 122 votes, including Zakharov's, were cast for Rudnev's proposal.

The meeting broke up in a serious and rather disturbed atmosphere. Vanya Galchenko overtook Kravchuk in the corridor. The latter was upset.

There was an atmosphere of gloom in the fourth detachment dormitory where everybody gathered to wait for Zyriansky. But when he came in he was as merry and bright acid business-like as ever: "Our detachment's in the soup! Don't get into a panic though. We're a good detachment all the same. It'll teach you a lesson. Now pull yourselves together!"

An hour later the day's grave events had passed out of everybody's mind. There was other news of a happier nature. The projection booth had now been put in order and the next day there was to be a film show. According to Petrov the second, it would be "Storm over Asia," a picture that had been long awaited and of which much favourable comment had been heard from the film-fans.

And so it was. The next day Petrov the second brought "Storm over Asia" from the town. Petrov, it should be added, was now no longer the cinema operator, only assistant cinema operator, but that was even better.

"Even better," he said. "Now with Misha's help I shall pass the exams much sooner."

So, as things turned out, whichever way the bureaucrats span his wheel of fate, it was to Petrov the second's and not to their own advantage.

The fourth detachment crept into the hall long before the beginning of the show, even before the blue-arm-banded ushers had taken up their stances at the doors. They all sat next to each other in one row as Zyriansky told them something he remembered about Genghis Khan. Later on the whole colony turned up.

Zakharov walked between the rows with the commander on duty and told him: "You can start. I shall be in my office."

The lights went out, a whizzing sound came from the projection booth at the back of the hall, a broad hazy beam shot out overhead, and events began to unfold on the screen. And all the fourth detachment clean forgot about their painful mishap, about the four thousand revs spindle. They were living out there in the distant steppes, living through the struggle afoot there and the one life held out for them too....

After an interval came the second part, then the third, the most gripping of all. And it happened that in the middle of the third part the silence that reigned in the dim hall was rent by the voice of commander on duty Pokhozhai: "The whole of the fourth detachment is to report immediately to the director in his office."

"Quiet now! Hurry up!" Zyriansky whispered.

They shot along the gangway, followed by many pairs of eyes.

"What's up?" someone asked Pokhozhai.

"Nothing special! Watch the picture!"

They burst into the office like a wave breaking on a sandy shore. Zakharov picked up his hat.

"Is the fourth all here?"

"All of us!"

"Some shavings behind the assembly-shop have caught 'fire. I think we can manage without the help of the fire brigade. Take the buckets from the kitchen. No panic or noise now! I'll come along too."

Zyriansky raised his arm.

"Kravchuk, take these four and go for the buckets. The rest follow me!"

They ran out of the building into the cool of the evening. They saw the fire as soon as they turned the corner: low treacherous flames were spreading quietly over the surface of a heap of old tightly-packed shavings. The fourth detachment headed by Zakharov doused the fire with buckets of water for a long time and poked about the heart of the pile with spades and forks.

"Thank you, comrades!" said Zakharov when it was all over.

They all went back to the cinema delighted. The last, part was being shown. The fourth detachment passed on in whispers the story of how they had extinguished the fire and were the envy of all.

16

The Rest Cure

Blum bore the three-day closure of the foundry with stoicism, though it was true that he lost a little weight. There were even rumours in the colony — to which not much credence was given, however — that Blum was ill. But such rumours were not without foundation. After running round his work-shops and taking a turn round the silent foundry one day, Blum called on the doctor. This visit, of course, provided the evidence that he was ill: without having any special capacity for hatred, Blum's feelings towards the doctor were more like hatred than any other emotion, since it was none other than the doctor who had invented foundry fever. Blum emerged from the little hospital calmer in spirit but still more shaken in health. He told one of the older colonists in the Commanders' Council room:

"It's my heart, he told me! Don't let anything worry you—otherwise there'll *be* the devil to bargain with."

In spite of this, however, three days later the foundry-shop roof was crowned by a tall chimney made of new iron. The colonists looked at it with some doubts.

"It'll fall down anyway," said Sancho Zorin. "It won't survive the first storm."

Blum jutted his lower lip at Zorin in an expression of contempt.

"What are you talking about, I should like to know? Fall down! Won't survive the storm! Where do you think we are, in the Atlantic Ocean?"

But that day Volonchuk strengthened the chimney with four long supporting wires and the colonists stopped discussing it. Blum came to the Council, purposely to crow over them.

"Where are these tempests of yours? Why have they died down? Has your barometer stopped forecasting them?"

On her way through the yard, Wanda Stadnitskaya also looked at the chimney and smiled faintly: there were jokes about Blum and his ventilation system among the girls of the fifth detachment. The question of foundry fever, moreover, already meant something to Wanda: it had almost made her cry to see Vanya Galchenko in the middle of the floor at that general meeting.

When Wanda first turned up for work in the stadium the boys gave her a warm welcome, giving her the best bench near the window and falling over each other in their eagerness to show her how to hold the rasp and keep the bench tidy, make out order forms and deal with the controller.

Wanda began by cleaning top slats for the chair-backs. Then Shtivel noticed how painstakingly she worked and gave her a more responsible job. When the completed sets of chairs were ready for polishing it was found that there were cracks, splinters and cavities in them. Using glue and oak sawdust, Wanda mixed a thick paste which she stuffed into the defective places with a small wooden spatula, finishing off by sand-papering. After polishing, these places could not be told from the rest of the surface. There was no qualification attached to this job, but that aspect of the matter never entered Wanda's mind. It gave her a pleasant feeling to turn in to the controller a set ready for polishing and to know that she had been responsible for that.

In her relations with the colonists, Wanda was gentle, restrained and rather quiet. She had not yet managed to find out very well what sort of place the colony was, and was not yet fully convinced that it was a part of her life. She saw clearly that life in the colony in no way resembled what she had known previously, but that earlier life remained firmly fixed in her mind and filled her dreams at night. Sometimes it almost seemed to her that her real life belonged to the night and that with the day began some kind of dream-life. This did not alarm her for she was simply too lazy to ponder over it. She loved the mornings at the colony—so friendly and fast-moving, so noisy with clamorous bugle-calls, the hurry-scurry of tidying-up, the jokes and laughter. She liked to take a hand in these whirlwind activities, helping the detachment monitor or carrying out some assignment for the commander. She liked, too, the silence that suddenly fell on the colony, always unexpectedly dazzling appearance of the commanders on duty, and the firm jolly ceremonious greeting: "Good morning, comrades!"

Wanda liked the snow-white cleanliness of the dining-hall, the flowers that stood on the tables and grew outside in the borders, and the brief interval in the sunshine on the porch before the signal for work. And she liked the evenings with the quietness of the dormitory, the park, and the short but thrillingly interesting general meetings....

But Wanda had not yet learned to like people. The boys were polite and attentive but she awaited with suspicion the time when this screen of politeness would be dropped and they would all be revealed as those same young men who chased after her during her “free life.” Besides, she kept catching glimpses of Ryzhikov’s face in the crowd of young fellows. At first Gontar with his low brow and moist lips seemed to her the one most to be feared; but when she found out that he was in love with Oksana, she promptly saw him in a quite different light, as a boy with a good kind face.

Her approach to the girls was marked with suspicion too. They were not merely girls; each one of them had her own looks, eyes, brows and lips; she thought them all to be prigs, self-seekers and flirts at heart; she sensed the woman in each of them and distrusted them all. Every one of the girls kept some kind of finery in the clothes cupboard: dress-lengths, underwear, boxes of thread, ribbons or shoes. But Wanda had nothing, and while the other girls’ beds had two or three pillows on them, on hers lay but one. All this evoked envy and suspicion in her, causing her to look more readily for shortcomings in her companions. But since she was not naturally inclined to be quarrelsome her feeling of distrust expressed itself in silence and unshared smiles. Yet there was always the possibility that she would give vent to her feelings, and she herself awaited the outburst with alarm because she did not want it to happen. One day Zakharov asked Klava how Wanda was getting on.

“Wanda keeps very much to herself...” Klava replied. “She’s obedient—but—well, in her mind she’s quite alone.”

“Has she made friends with anybody?”

“With nobody at all. She’s getting used to things very slowly.”

“It’s better that way,” said Zakharov. “There’s no-hurry.’ Leave her alone and don’t try to force her. Let her just rest.”

“Yes, I know.”

“Good girl.”

Unaware of it herself, Wanda really was resting. Memories of her stormy past began to fade and it was the shop she worked in, the general meetings and all of a sudden Oksana that now appeared in her dreams.

She used to see Oksana in the park or at the cinema but felt too shy to make her acquaintance, the more so because Oksana seemed to be keeping her distance too. Wanda knew that Oksana was a farm-hand, a servant, and that Gontar was in love with her and Igor Chernyavin had kissed her in the park and then apologized. When they met, Wanda looked at Oksana very closely. In that face with its olive-toned cheeks, tremulous dark eyes and the cautious glances that she was able to-catch, Wanda thought she could detect an expression of real human suffering: Oksana was a farm-hand.

Fresh Air

Igor Chernyavin often looked at himself in the mirror these days. He had received his parade uniform though as yet he had to wear it without the badge. It showed him to have well-shaped legs and a slim waist. He thought he was examining himself in the mirror in order to have a good laugh over the fact that he'd become a well-behaved colonist, hard at work in the assembly-shop, polishing off chair-struts and getting what came to him for kissing a girl. He'd apologized to the girl like a gentleman. Next week he was certain to pass the 8th form entrance exam and a month later ought to get the title of colonist. A paragon of good behaviour, who could have thought it possible? The odd thing about it was that he quite enjoyed it.

With every day Igor felt a new sense of strength rising within him. He had not yet struck up any friendships, but didn't feel any the worse off for that—Besides, he was on good terms with everybody, cracked jokes and was always sure of being met with a smile. As a reader he was already famous. When Shura Myatnikova sees him entering the library she 'greeted him as an honoured client, looks around the shelves to whet his appetite and with devilish grace bounds up the ladder and calls down: "What about some Shakespeare?"

The look she casts on him is sly and enticing. She so much wants to improve Shakespeare's standing on the reading list, which till now is comparatively poor. Igor for his part feels pleased, perhaps because he is being singled out as a serious reader, or because he likes the idea of reading Shakespeare, or even because Shura Myatnikova on the top step of the ladder looked a sister to him—and who would not be grateful for such a sister?

Igor carries off the huge volume of Shakespeare under his arm. On the way the younger boys look at him respectfully—not for anything are they ever allowed to borrow such a lovely big book—while Vladimir Kolos, whom he bumps into, exclaims:

"What have you got there? Oh, so you're reading Shakespeare, are you? Good for you! You're doing well, Chernyavin. I see you're catching up...."

Vladimir Kolos's praise is really worth something, he's a veteran of the colony, and afterwards is going to study at the Moscow Aviation Institute. Igor feels really enthusiastic when he opens his Shakespeare in the dormitory and finds it to be not at all bad. Reading "Othello" makes him laugh, for Othello strikes him as being frightfully like Gontar.

"This is all about you, Misha!"

"About me? What are you talking about?"

"One of these fellows in the book gets jealous like you."

"In the book and like me?"

"But I'm telling you, he's your spitting image!"

"If you imagine I'm jealous, Chernyavin, you're wrong. You don't understand anything. All you are interested in is kissing,"

Gontar is sly. He is convinced that Igor is only interested in kissing. And what Gontar is interested in is nobody's business. The eighth detachment, however, knows very well

what Misha Gontar's aiming at: in the coming winter he is going to take driving lessons, and then he is going to get a lorry from somewhere and drive it.

Zakharov has promised to find him some place to live in and then Misha will marry Oksana. All the colony, even the fourth detachment kids, know about "this devilish plan but Gontar's only reaction is a cryptic smile—let them jabber if they want to. He wears an air as if he nurses far more ambitious plans. The boys do not argue with him. Misha is a good sort.

Gontar's plans were known to the whole colony and, to some extent, of course, to Gontar too.... But nobody knew what Oksana's intentions were and Gontar himself did not seem to know them. The colonists had sharp eyes, much sharper than Gontar's. Oksana came to the cinema; and during the day-time, she brought her basket to the colony to collect shavings. Late in the afternoon during women's hour at the bathing pond she came for a swim. Wasn't that enough for knowing eyes to see whether she was thinking of becoming the wife of lorry-driver Gontar?

It was common knowledge that Oksana was a farmhand, exploited by a lawyer who had never once shown himself in the colony. Everybody felt sorry for her, but, at the same time, many other things about her were noticed: her peculiar quiet cheerfulness, the calm dignity of her bearing, her slow smile and intelligent eyes. She was never heard to utter a single complaint. But the chief thing "was that she was never seen taking a walk with Misha Gontar, which could in any way be called flirtatious—and colonists were experts in recognizing that kind of walk. The girl had some individual quality which no one had yet unravelled and of which Gontar had not the slightest idea.

One day towards evening, during the August holidays, Igor and Gontar found themselves together, quite by accident, in the dormitory. They were both engaged in dressing themselves up. Gontar was taking his time over combing his hair. Igor was polishing his boots. Gontar eyed Igor's gleaming boots and fresh trouser crease with suspicion, but said nothing. Igor, being the more talkative by nature, asked: "Where are you going, I should like to know?"

"If you're so inquisitive, why not follow me?"

"All right, I will."

They fell silent.

Then Igor spoke again: "You've no right to be wearing parade uniform."

"What if I'm going to town? I'm going right away to the commander on duty to tell him I've got leave."

"Oh, you're going to town, are you? Fine!"

"As a matter of fact I was just trying on my uniform to see whether it was creased."

"I don't think so...."

"All right, you don't think so."

Again silence. But Gontar distinctly saw Igor carefully arranging his handkerchief in his breast pocket. He could not contain himself and asked: "And where are you going?"

"Me? Oh, nowhere special. I'm fond of fresh air, you know."

“Well, just-think of that! Fresh air! There’s nothing but fresh air in the colony.”

“Don’t you say so, Milord. You’re forgetting that foundry—the smoke from it is quite disgusting. . . .”

Igor fastidiously waved a hand below his nose. This snobbish gesture threw Gontar into a rage: “Don’t put on those airs! The foundry’s not working today, it’s a holiday.”

“I have such a delicate sense of smell, sir, that I can’t stand even yesterday’s smoke.”

Gontar concluded from all this that Igor was bent on going as far as he could from the foundry. And once he was convinced of that he dropped his jocular suspicious tone and said meaningly: “You know, Chernyavin, I don’t advise you to go all the same.”

“Don’t worry, Misfaa.”

They left the dormitory together, and together they crossed the park and walked towards the dam.

“But tell me where *are* you going?” asked Gontar.

“Just walking across the colony. Haven’t I the right to?”

“You have.”

Gontar was a just man, so he kept silent until they had crossed the dam. But once on the other side, he put no more questions.

“You’re not going any farther!” he stated, baldly.

“Why not?”

“You’re just not. Where do you think you’re going?”

“Taking a stroll.”

“Inside the colony?”

“No, round it. Haven’t I the right?”

“You have, only ...”

“Only what?”

“I shall sock you on the jaw, Chernyavin!”

“How can you use words like ‘sock’ on such a beautiful evening in May?”

“Stop blabbing about May evenings! It’s not May now, anyway! Do you think I don’t see what your game is? I tell you you’re not going any farther.”

“I know how to do a Japanese blow, Misha. It’s terribly effective.”

“Huh, Japanese! Do you think a Russian one’s not as good?”

Gontar planted himself resolutely across the path and clenched his right fist in a really Russian way.

“It’s no good fighting without seconds, Misha.”

“What the hell do I care about your seconds! All I’m saying is turn back.”

“You’re a real Othello. I shall go on whatever happens. But you’re not going to get me striking the first blow. I’ve no intention of being put in the middle, especially for such a thing -as defending myself against a blood-thirsty Othello.”

The reference to “the middle” upset Gontar. He turned round and saw Oksana, in the company of an elderly man who was wearing wide everyday trousers and a long Russian shirt. “His head was devoid of any covering, even hair, his face clean-shaven, thin and rather pleasant-looking. Then Igor and Gontar realized that it was the exploiter himself and his face at once ceased to be pleasant in their eyes. Oksana was walking at his side. She had white gym shoes on and wore a white ribbon in her braided hair. Nobody could deny that today she looked more delightful than ever. The two colonists made way for them as they walked towards the dam. Gontar raised his arm gloomily in salute. Igor followed suit. Oksana averted her eyes. The bald-headed man assumed that he was the object of the gestures and saluted likewise, adding: “Do you know whether Zakharov is at home, Comrade Colonists?”

“Alexei Stepanovich is always at home,” replied Gontar with dignity.

Oksana stepped on to the dam first. The others followed her.

“What a good time you have in the colony!” exclaimed the bald-headed man. “Oh, how I wish I were fifteen again.”

The gesture with which his words were accompanied expressed genuine self-pity.

Gontar eyed him mistrustfully: the exploiter was putting on a clever act!

And so they walked to the very doors of the main building, the three of them in Oksana’s wake, chatting about the colony. Gontar behaved like a man who was not going to be taken in, answering politely with a diplomatic smile, but careful not to let himself be carried away, and trying not to divulge a single secret. When asked how many oil-cans a day were being made, he replied: “That’s a question of the book-keeping department.”

And he winked at Igor behind his questioner’s back.

Nevertheless he readily went to find the commander on duty.

“There are some people to see the director,” he announced.

For fully half an hour Igor and Gontar paced amicably up and down the deserted corridor.

“I wonder what they came for?” Gontar burst out.

Begunok dashed off somewhere to return with Klava Kashirina. Then the bald-headed gentleman passed them.

“Good-bye, comrades!” he said with a polite bow.

Igor and Gontar exchanged looks but neither ventured any remarks.

At length, Klava and Oksana came out of the office. Oksana was in front and on seeing the boys threw them a somewhat flustered glance. But Klava was radiant with happiness. Making a gay, studied bow she exclaimed in her beautiful silvery voice:

“Let me introduce you to our new colonist Oksana Litovchenko.”

For a long time the boys went on staring after the two girls; then they looked at each other.

“Milord,” said Igor, “may I now go and take some fresh air?”

But Gontar too was now in his element.

“Blockhead, I told you in plain Russian that the air is good everywhere in the colony!”

The whole corridor echoed with their laughter. The sentry looked at them sternly but they kept on laughing till they reached the dormitory. Only there Gontar declared, seriously:

“You understand, of course, Chernyavin, that now all love affairs are over and done with.”

“As far as I’m concerned I realize that, but I’m not so sure about you.”

But Gontar eyed him haughtily.

“You forget I’m fourth on the list of colonists, old man!”

18

That’s Grand

Enveloped up to the neck in a sheet, Oksana sits on a chair in the fifth detachment dormitory. Wanda circles round her wielding a pair of scissors while other girls look on and smile. Oksana has beautiful wavy hair shot with bright auburn tints.

“I shall give you two braids. They’ll be so pretty, oh, you can’t imagine how pretty they’ll be!” exulted Wanda. “You don’t know what you’re talking about, girls: how can you think of cutting such lovely long hair? You just need to trim the ends like this, you see... and then they’ll grow better.”

Wanda’s eyes shine with audacity. She bites her lower lip and ever so carefully trims the ends of the unbound hair. Oksana sits quietly, her cheeks burning.

With a professional gesture, Wanda snatches the sheet away.

“Thank you,” said Oksana, rising uncertainly from the chair.

Wanda flung the sheet on the floor, threw her arms round Oksana and hugged her close.

“Oh, you poor sweet little farm girl!”

The other girls were quite moved and burst into happy laughter. Oksana turned her dark eyes on them and smiled somewhat slyly.

“Enough of this coddling! Let’s go to see Alexei Stepanovich,” Klava interrupted them.

“What for?” Wanda asked heatedly.

“He wanted to talk to us.”

“Then I’m coming too.”

“Come on, then.”

It was “rush hour,” when there were always a lot of people to see Torsky and Zakharov. In Torsky’s room you could sit as long as you liked on the long benches, talking and laughing without constraint, but if you went to Zakharov’s office you dropped ‘your voice not to disturb his work. Of course, even here there were exceptions to the rule one way or the other: sometimes Zakharov would start chatting and cracking jokes with

the boys, and there were times when he would look up with sudden severity and say: "Please reduce your occupation of my territory *by* fifty per cent."

It was never his way to tell them simply to clear out.

The arrival of the girls caused general surprise in the Commanders' Council room. Oksana in colony dress! What news! Begunok alone kept his usual nonchalance. Flinging open the office door he struck the pose of a traffic regulator: "This way, please!"

Zakharov stood up behind his desk. His other visitors fell quiet in their surprise.

"Well, here you are... let's have a look at you ... you make a fine colonist. Did you go to school?"

"Yes," answered Oksana. "Seven years."

"Were your marks good?"

"Yes."

Igor Chernyavin, who was silting on the settee, chipped in: "The only thing wrong with you, Oksana, is that you ought to be a bit surer of yourself. There's something... well... countrified about you."

That was too much for Wanda.

"Just look at him, with his city ways!" she exclaimed.

Zakharov adjusted his pince-nez.

"So your marks were good," he mused. "What does twelve times twelve make? Could you answer that, Chernyavin?"

"Er, what was that?"

"Twelve times twelve. What does it make?"

Igor looked at the ceiling and did some rapid calculating.

"One hundred and four!" he blurted.

"Did you get that result by calculating the country or the town way?" asked Zakharov.

Igor was the target of many provocative looks. Heads were put together, all sorts of suggestions were whispered without much assurance, but Igor, after gazing at the ceiling again, repeated:

"One hundred and four!"

"You see, Oksana, dear," said Zakharov with a sigh. "That's what we have to put up with in life! Comes a young man from the city and proudly tells us that twelve times twelve makes one hundred and four. And yet he doesn't know that an American scientist discovered recently that twelve times twelve doesn't make one hundred and four."

The girls cast teasing smiles at Igor, the boys on the settee rocked with laughter, but Igor verified his calculations yet again and then it dawned on him that Zakharov was deliberately pulling his leg. He remained anxious, however, to show his mettle in the presence of Oksana: his was not a spirit to be so easily daunted by such leg-pulls. Vanya Galchenko, it is true, was nudging him from his seat beside him, and the nudge was of a clearly mathematical nature, but Igor disregarded it: "Americans also make mistakes

sometimes, Alexei Stepanovich. There are times when Russians give a hundred points to Americans,”

“You see, Oksana. A really bad example of deformation of national pride, Igor is giving the Americans a hundred and four points.”

Oksana could not help laughing at this. And she showed herself in a new light, not at all shy and quite capable of laughing frankly, without affectation or shyness. Then she turned to Igor with a straightforward question: “How did you work it out?”

Igor felt as if the ground beneath his feet was rocking but he was not going to admit his defeat.

“I did it this way. Ten times ten is a hundred, twice two makes four. One hundred plus four makes one hundred and four.”

Oksana looked at him in amazement. Zakharov shrugged his shoulders: “There’s nothing for it, Oksana! He’s right! One hundred plus four makes one hundred and four. We’ll have to acknowledge ourselves beaten, won’t we, Oksana?”

Zakharov was interrupted by a general clamour of excited voices. The colonists sprang out of their seats, waving their arms in the air and all shouting at once.

“Don’t you see he’s wrong? He’s made a mistake! Alexei Stepanovich! Work it out yourself! Whoever multiplies that way, Chernyavin? One hundred and four, nonsense!”

The older ones smiled knowingly. Zakharov laughed.

“What’s this, Igor? It seems the Russians are against you too. Well, you’ll sort it out between yourselves later on. By the way, Klava, who’s going to take charge of Oksana?”

“I’d thought of Marusya, but now Wanda wants to. The trouble is she hasn’t got colonist title yet.”

Wanda stepped forward and took her place beside Oksana.

“I know I’m not a colonist yet,” she said gravely, “but, Alexei Stepanovich, let me....”

Zakharov took a deep look into her eyes. The others had now grown silent and cocked their heads.

“I see...” said Zakharov, slowly. “This is very important. So you would like to take charge of her, would you?”

“Yes. I would.”

Not a sound could be heard in the room. Wanda took everybody in with a sweeping glance, and with a toss of the head, went on: “And you’d better all know that I mean to defend her!”

Zakharov rose to his feet and gave Wanda his hand, “Thank you, Wanda, you’re a good sort.” “So are you!”

Only then did the children give vent to their feelings. They made a dash for Oksana and formed a ring round her.

“That’s grand!” someone’s voice rang out.

Late that evening when everyone was in bed, Zakharov tidied his desk, picked up his hat and turned to Vitya Torsky.

“Tell me, Vitya, where have the children got the Idea from that Oksana was a farm-hand?” “That’s what the whole colony says.” “But why?”

“They say she worked for that lawyer. A sort of servant to look after the vegetable garden. Why, isn’t it true?”

“Oksana Litovchenko is the daughter of a Communist worker. He died last winter. Her mother died somewhat earlier. Oksana was being taken care of by Comrade Cherny who is not a lawyer at all but a professor of Soviet law. He served at the front with Oksana’s father.”

“Then why did she work in the vegetable garden?”

“What about it? She planted the garden herself, so you see she likes the work. Do you think only farmhands work?”

Torsky was quite nonplussed.

“Well, this is a surprise! And here we’ve been calling him an exploiter!”

“That’s you fellows all over. You’re not short of imagination!”

“We must put it straight at the next meeting.” Zakharov put his hat on.

“No, there’s no need to say anything yet,” he said with a smile. “The matter will straighten itself out.” “Very good, Comrade Director.” Zakharov went into the passage. A night-light burned in the vestibule. The sentry rose from his chair and stood to attention.

“Good night to you, Yuri!” “Good night, Alexei Stepanovich!” Zakharov took the path that skirted “B” Wing. The lights were out in all dormitories but at one window a girl’s head showed as she leaned out. He heard Wanda’s voice calling: “Good night, Alexei Stepanovich!” “Why aren’t you asleep, Wanda?” “I don’t feel like it.” “What are you doing there?” “Nothing special, just looking out.” “Go to bed at once, do you hear?” “And if I don’t want to?”

“What do you mean ‘don’t want to’ when I’ve ordered you to?”

Wanda laughed and replied: “Very good, Comrade Director!”

Klava’s head popped up over her shoulder.

“Whom are you talking to, Wanda?” she enquired. “You tell her not to spend the night day-dreaming, Alexei Stepanovich. She just sits and day dreams. There’s no sense in it!”

“I’m not ‘dreaming. I just look out, that’s all. But I won’t do it any more, Alexei Stepanovich.”

“Get her into bed, Klava!”

There was a scuffling noise; a few giggles and the girls disappeared. Now in all the windows it was dark and quiet.

It was prepared in secret. Without previous warning, Zyriansky ordered the fourth detachment into parade uniform after supper. The surprising thing was that no one in the detachment asked what it was all about. The boys whispered and smiled among

themselves so much that Vanya asked Filka Shary in a low voice: "What's going to happen? Do tell me."

"There's something that has to be done . . . Terribly interesting!" Shary whispered.

When the signal for the general meeting was played, Zyriansky lined them all up and led them towards the hall. They found Begunok waiting for them in the vestibule with his bugle. He joined the head of the procession, tripping beside Zyriansky. They were met with smiles and applause when they filed into the Quiet Room. In there they did not join the others on the benches, but lined up in front of the bust of Stalin, facing the meeting. Then in came Zakharov and Torsky, talking gleefully about something to each other and casting knowing looks at the fourth detachment. Torsky declared the meeting open.

"I call on commander of the fourth detachment Comrade Zyriansky," he exclaimed.

Zyriansky took a few paces forward and cried:

"Fourth detachment—shun!"

"Comrade Colonists," he went on. "At a meeting of the fourth detachment, attended by fourteen members, it was decided unanimously to request the general meeting to confer the title of colonist on our probationer Ivan Galchenko. Ivan Galchenko is known to us as a good comrade, a conscientious worker and a bright lad. You will hear more about him from Colonist Vladimir Begunok who has been in charge of him. Galchenko, five steps forward—march!"

Vanya, blushing in embarrassment, planted himself next to his commander. Begunok also stepped out of rank and in restrained official tones said a few things about Vanya. Galchenko had only been in the detachment for three months but that is long enough to get to know all about a fellow. He never quarrels, is always punctual, does everything he is told to do efficiently and quickly, is always in a good mood. He doesn't suck up to anybody, whether it's his own commander or the commander on duty or any of the senior colonists. He is now turning out eighty cores per working-day and everybody is satisfied with him. He reads *Pionerskaya Pravda* every day and knows about the October Revolution, about Lenin and Stalin and how Denikin, Yudenich and Kolchak were defeated. Besides that he knows about the building of the Dnieper Dam, the collectivization of agriculture and the struggle with the kulaks. He has learned all that very well. He intends to join the Red Air Force when he leaves the colony, but wants to fly a fighter-plane, not a bomber. That is what he's saying now anyway; of course time will show. Vanya is very fond of the colony. He knows all its rules and regulations, is studying music and wants to join the band. Well, that's the sort of fellow he is; and Begunok concludes by saying that being in charge of Vanya is the easiest job in the world.

Then Mark Grinhaus takes up the tale and announces that the Komsomol organization supports the fourth detachment's proposal. During the past three months Vanya has shown that he deserves the First of May badge. Those detachments with probationers of up to four months' standing ought to be ashamed of themselves. Other colonists put in a few words. They all supported Vanya's worthiness to receive the mark of honour. "He's a good colonist," interjected Klava Kashirina. "Always neat, well-mannered, orderly. He's really one of our sort, a good worker."

Then Zakharov rose. After a moment's thought he spread his hands as if giving up: "You know it's my job and habit to find fault, but when it comes to Vanya—well, there simply is no fault to find. The only thing is: take care not to spoil him, you in the fourth detachment. As for you, Vanya, try not to believe everything they say if they praise you. Just try and do still better. There's nothing worse, you know, than a fellow who's praised too much. Do you understand?"

Vanya was living in a haze but it was clear to him what Zakharov wanted from him and he nodded pensively.

That was the end of speech-making.

"Only colonists are to vote," declared Torsky. "AH those in favour of Galchenko being given the title of colonist please raise their hands."

A forest of hands shot up. Vanya stood beside his commander, overwhelmed with joy and surprise.

"Carried unanimously! Stand up, please!"

To his even greater surprise, Vanya saw everybody get up and from the far corner of the room Vladimir Kolos, first on the colony list, cross the gleaming floor and make for the fourth detachment.

Kolos was carrying a diamond-shaped piece of velvet bearing the letters of the badge in gold and silver thread.

"Vanya Galchenko!" he said. "This is your badge that makes you a full-fledged member of our colony. Put the interests of the colony and of the Soviet state above your personal interest. If you are ever called on to defend our state against its enemies, fight bravely, wisely and toughly. Congratulations!"

He shook Vanya's hand and gave him the badge. Everybody clapped. Zyriansky laid his hands on Vanya's shoulders. By then Torsky had closed the meeting and all crowded around the new colonist, shaking hands with him and offering their congratulations. Among them was Zakharov.

"It's up to you now, Vanya!" he said as he took Vanya's hand. "Show me the badge! I can see you're just dying to sew it on for him, Lida...."

"Yes, of course!"

Lida bent her golden head to Vanya.

"Come along to our room!"

For the first time in his life Vanya went into the eleventh detachment dormitory. The girls surrounded him, led him to the bench, pressed chocolates on him, asked him all kinds of questions and laughed a lot; then he slipped off his tunic and gave it to Lida Talikova who sewed the badge on the left sleeve herself. When he was dressed again they turned him round and round in front of the mirror. Shura Myatnikova leaned over his shoulder. He saw her white even teeth in a smile reflected in the mirror.

"Oh, just look what a pair of beauties we make!"

And when he took his leave of them they all called out:

"Come again, Vanya, come again!"

Shura Myatnikova pushed her way through them:

“Word of honour, I’m going to put his name down for the library circle! He’s just the efficient sort of boy I need. You’ll join my circle, won’t you?”

Vanya looked up. He wasn’t feeling abashed or stuck up, he was simply overwhelmed by the evening’s happy events, for which he was quite unprepared by any fore knowledge of how much joy in life a man can stand. These girls with their unbelievably lovely faces, their high spirits and wonderful voices, their spotlessly clean sweet-scented dormitory, even the chocolates they’d offered him, held some exalted charm which it was beyond human comprehension to grasp. Certainly Vanya didn’t grasp it. He promised to work in the library circle.

And all this happened in one evening of that happy month of August, which was packed with so many more happy days and evenings!

News suddenly spread that the doctor was still far from satisfied with the new ventilation system and was insisting that all the small fry making cores should be transferred immediately to another work-shop. In Zakharov’s office Slum delivered a speech in which he called the doctor’s attention to his worn-out heart: “As a doctor you must know very well that if I’m to have trouble every day over that chimney, not even the stoutest heart will be able to stand it....”

“Sheer nonsense!” the doctor retorted, blinking angrily at Blum. “Your heart has nothing to do with it!”

The whole affair ended with the Commanders’ Council putting older colonists on the job, Ryzhikov among them, and transferring the youngsters to turning work. Such an unusual and unforeseen stroke of good fortune so astounded the fourth detachment that they all became completely hoarse for several days.

The turner! Where are the fairy-tales and legends in which turners figure? You may have: Baba-Yaga the Bony-legged Ogress, the Tale of the Golden Saucer, the Juicy Apple, the Loaf that Spoke, the (Kind-Hearted Hares and the Well-intentioned Foxes, the tale of Moidodyr, Doctor Aibolit—they are all at your disposal. On a fine night all you have to do is to open your eyes wide and go flying away in your imagination into the depths of a fairy-tale forest, along a maze of untrodden paths, to vast lands galore. That you can do, nobody grudges you that, and grown-ups are always very pleased to tell such tales. But just try and ask them for an ordinary turning-lathe, nothing special like a Moscow or Kolomna type, but the commonest type of all, a Samara lathe! And you will find out at once that it’s a joy still more unattainable than the possession of the Cloak of Invisibility. A turning-lathe? What are you talking about? They’ll let you mould, or polish a bit of wood in the assembly-shop but nobody ever thinks of offering a turner’s metal-lathe to you.

And then all of a sudden they all ‘become turners—Shary, Kiryusha Novaik, Petka Kravchuk and even Vanya, whose knowledge was but yesterday confined to the technology of black shoe-polish. Metal-turners! The very sound of the words they use in talking about it rings like delightful music in the ear, their voices drop a few pitches, they stride with more assurance and vitally important questions come into their minds and are immediately answered. They look on life with new eyes, their brains function in a new way. They think of the dressmaking-shop and the assembly-stadium with contempt.

Can they really be called work-shops? And now they understand how insignificant and pitiable are those who work in the stadium and are known as carpenters.

However there were some words that the newly-fledged turners tried to close their ears to. For instance, when some Samara lathes were delivered, deputy-commander of the eighth Alexander Ostapchin said, for all to hear: "Where did you pick up those old crocks, Solomon Davidovich? They must date from the time of Boris Godunov!"

As usual Blum expressed his contempt by jutting out his lower lip: "It's really awful how educated you're becoming, all of you asking for something modern! I don't care whether they belong to Boris's time or Yefim's for that matter but we'll do a good job on those machines."

It was the words of Blum and not those of Ostapchin that remained in the newcomers' minds.

Came the glorious day of triumph when the fourth detachment took their places before the turning-lathes for the first time and laid their right hands on the tool-rests. The boys felt their legs tremble with excitement, they kept their eyes glued to the oil-cans wedged in the chucks. Blum stood beside them, and it soothed his tired old heart to see them.

"Well, well, not such a bad lot of turners!" he muttered. "People get a bit above themselves sometimes. Asking for Oerlikons and high calibration work! Now these are what are known as stripping-machines in turners' talk."

Shary, Kiryusha Novak and Vanya were not in the least interested in who were getting above themselves, what Oerlikons were or what was the idea of calibration work. What mattered to them was that it lay within their power to operate or stop real high-class marvellous turning-lathes from whose tools real copper shavings came curling as real oil-cans piled up ready to be machined, those very cans which all the factories in the country were awaiting impatiently.

That August saw another event of no less import. School re-opened and Vanya Galchenko took his seat at the first desk in the 5th form. Nearly all the fourth detachment was assigned to this form as it had been to the turning-work. But in addition there was Misha Gontar who sat at the very last desk. Already at the beginning of the month he was expressing his contempt for the school: "What's the use of my joining the 5th form if I'm going to take lorry-driving courses anyway?"

Gontar shared his desk with Petrov the second. What was the sense of his joining the 5th form either? What could they teach him there about film-projection or, say, converters? But Zakharov had something to say on the subject at a general meeting: "I warn you. Don't let me hear any of this talk: 'What do I want with school, I've learned enough?' If anybody fails to attend school of his own accord, he'll have to look forward to being put in the middle. And if any of you are dreaming about taking driving lessons or cinema-operator's courses, let me tell you that if your marks are bad, I'll not allow you to take those courses, you can just forget about them.... To sum up: remember that he who doesn't want to learn is a bad Soviet citizen who has no place in our ranks."

. . . Misha Gontar sat scowling at the last desk, a frown wrinkling his brow. The wrinkles spread in horizontal lines, reaching right up to the line of his hair, but when the teacher came in and opened the lesson they became vertical. When the 5th form unanimously elected Gontar as monitor, he stood before them and said: "I warn you,

you've elected me, so don't howl about it afterwards! You'd better know it right away; if there's the slightest trouble I'll have the culprit in the middle. If there's anybody who doesn't study voluntarily, we'll use force to make him. Let him stand out there at attention and get what's coming to him. He'll learn what teachers are paid for. You'll find this is no joking matter."

Gontar's record was well 'known to the 5th form, especially his previous failures-at school. But now he faced them as their monitor and nobody questioned his right, especially as his face expressed utter sincerity and, with it, incorruptible indignation.

Igor Chernyavin was placed in the 8th form. He hadn't quite made up his mind yet whether he wanted to study or not, but because Wanda and Oksana sat together in front of him the class-room and the face of the young teacher took on a pleasant aspect.

20

Comrade Kreutzer

September began in brilliant fashion. On September 1—Youth Day— Vanya took his place for the first time in the ranks of the colonists. Dressed in their parade uniforms with glittering badges, white collars, and embroidered skull-caps, the colonists formed one long line. The band took up position on their right flank. Vanya had learned that his place was in the sixth platoon among all the other small fry. Platoon commander Semyon Kasatkin, a scraggy fair-haired boy whom Vanya had occasionally caught sight of at the morning inspection as one of the Sanitary Commission and had taken for a rank- and -file colonist, suddenly revealed himself in quite unusual light. When the "fall in by platoons" signal was played and everybody made a dash for the broad space opposite the flower-beds, Kasatkin conjured up from somewhere a stern look, the deepest of voices, and a thoroughly military deportment. He faced the platoon and said in a voice full of confident authority: "Enough prattling, Gaidovsky!"

The boys fell quiet. All of them, including Gaidovsky, kept their eyes on the commander.

"Right dress!"

Vanya had already been told that once the "fall in" had sounded, the only person to retain his authority was the commander on duty; there were no more commanders, no Commanders' Council but just a formation consisting of six platoons and the band, with platoon leaders at the head of each who were not elected but appointed by Zakharov. No disputes were encouraged with these platoon leaders—you had to carry out their orders and that was the end of it.

Vanya's place was third from the right flank, according to his height in the platoon. While he was dressing and looking at Kasatkin again, he saw Zakharov come out. He was wearing colonist uniform too, with a badge, but wore a regulation hat in place of a skull-cap. He stood stiffly to attention before the rank" and ran his eyes slowly from the band along to the smallest of the small fry on the left flank of the sixth platoon. The line stood rigid with expectation.

In an unfamiliar, sharp, authoritative tone Zakharov gave the command: "Company, To the Colours shun!"

Then he turned his back on the front line and stood stock-still with his arm raised. All the colonists immediately sprang to attention and flung their arms up in salute. The band burst into a solemn tune, at once new and familiar. Vanya had no time to place the tune. He held his hand to his forehead and looked where everybody else was looking. Through the main doors, marching in step to the music came a small group. At its head marched commander on duty Lida Talikova with her hand at the salute; behind her came three other colonists, senior colonist Vladimir Kolos, who served as standard-bearer, between two who were armed with rifles. Vanya was seeing the First of May Colony banner for the first time, though he knew something about it. Standard bearer Kolos and his two attendants did not belong to any of the regular detachments but formed a special "banner detachment" which had a room of its own. This was the only room in the colony which was locked when left empty. There the colours stood on a small dais against a strip of velvet under a canopy made of the same material.

Kolos bore the banner with surprising ease as though it weighed nothing at all. The golden tip of the standard scarcely shook over his head and the heavy decorative gold-embroidered folds of crimson velvet fell straight to his shoulder.

The banner detachment passed along the whole line, which stood rigid and formal at the salute, and then came to a halt on the right flank. In the silence that followed Zakharov gave the command:

"Colonists Shary, Kravchuk, Novak—five paces ... forward!"

Thus came the moment of retribution for the overtime work on the moulds! With serious mien Vitya Torsky stepped forward and read from a sheet of paper the names of those colonists who had been reprimanded for a breach of colony discipline. Vanya, who was standing just behind Shary, saw how his ears were growing red. The ceremony over, Zakharov ordered the culprits to resume their places and Shary stepped back into the ranks and raised his eyes towards that place where he probably imagined justice to dwell.

But Zakharov was already giving another highly involved command. The band burst into a march and something started happening to the line. It broke in several places and before Vanya realized what had happened, the boys were marching in columns of eight along the road. Then he discovered that he was in the first rank of his platoon. In front of him marched Kasatkin by himself, and farther ahead bobbed a golden sea of skull-caps with the golden tip of the standard far beyond. Without changing step Kasatkin looked over his shoulder and cried angrily: "Galchenko, keep in step!"

By the time they had reached the outskirts of Khoroshilovka, Vanya felt quite at ease in the column. He did not have the slightest difficulty in keeping in step or in line. It was not only easy but fascinatingly interesting. On the pavements in Khoroshilovka, people gathered and cast admiring looks at the colonists. When they reached the main street of the town the music of the band sounded louder and merrier, and as they passed between a dense avenue of onlookers Vanya realized for the first time what a fine sight the colonists made. A little farther on, they took their place in the colourful line of the demonstration, met a Red Army regiment with whom they exchanged salutes, passed girls in blue costumes, bare-armed athletes, long columns of gay-looking lively school children. Everybody seemed delighted to see the colonists, calling out greetings to them, turning smiling faces towards them, expressing their surprise at the excellence of the band. The

women in the crowd were specially taken by the sixth detachment whose members were the youngest and most serious-looking of them all.

That evening Kreutzer turned up at the general meeting. He was a rare visitor. The colonists were fond of this man with a broad clean-shaven face, smiling eyes and unruly hair that fell all over his forehead. Of course it counted for a good deal that he was chairman of the Regional Executive Committee but there was more to it than that: they knew Kreutzer as someone who never threw his weight about, talked to them in plain terms and was always ready to laugh if there was something really to laugh about. That evening his arrival at the meeting was altogether unexpected. There was a moment of seriousness when they saluted him, but immediately afterwards everybody, including Kreutzer, was in smiles.

“You seem to be very jolly here tonight, comrades!”

“I should say we are!”

He strode towards the platform, but stopped and stood with a knowing look on his face, right in the middle of the floor where so many had passed disagreeable- moments.

“Do you know why I’m here this evening?” he began. “I’ve come to pat you on the back. They tell me you’ve done well.”

“We’re doing all right...” came from several parts of the room. “But tell us the details!”

“That I can do. You’ve been taken off the state account. You know what that means, don’t you? It means you’re no longer being subsidized, but living on your, own earnings. I think that’s splendid news.”

The colonists burst into applause.

“I congratulate you on it. But it’s not enough.”

“Not enough!”

“That’s what I said. You’ve got to do still better. Isn’t that ‘So?’”

“Right you are!”

“Your factory here isn’t up to much. It’s a shed.”

“A stadium,” a single voice rang out.

“Just that, a stadium,” Kreutzer agreed jovially and at once- sought Blum’s face. “Do you hear, Solomon Davidovich?”

“I’ve been hearing it a long time.”

“Well, that’s one thing-... now .about the lathes....”

“They’re not lathes, they’re goats!”

“Yes, that’s true enough, they’re goats.”

He took a seat among the lads on the steps of the dais and now his face wore a serious expression:

“Do you know what?” he told the meeting. “Let’s build a real factory. What do you say to that?”

“How are we going to do that?” asked Torsky.

“Well, just think of that!” Kreutzer retorted with a pout of his lips. “You don’t know how it can be done! We’ll build it and buy the machines.”

“What about the dibs?”

“You’ve got the dibs—300,000, haven’t you?”

“It isn’t enough!”

“That’s true! You need!—let me see—a million!”

“What about lending it to us,” shouted Shary.

“Lending it! H’m, that wouldn’t be worth while, because you’d have to borrow 700,000 when you’ve only got 300,000 of your own. But, do you know what? Listen, kids!”

He sprang to his feet as excitedly as if he himself were one of them.

“There is a way of doing it! It’s a fact. We can manage it. Listen! I’ll give you 400,000 and you’ll earn the other 300,000. How much time do you want to make another 300,000, Solomon Davidovich?”

Slum leaned forward, twiddling his fingers and chewing his lips.

“With colonists like ours—very fine people they are, I can tell you—it won’t take so long, say, a year.”

“Altogether, what?”

“Yes, a year. Perhaps even less.”

Kreutzer looked towards Zakharov who was smiling reservedly.

“Come on, Alexei Stepanovich, let’s do it.”

Zakhsrov looked thoroughly puzzled.

“We’ve been turning the matter over in our minds for- a long time,” he replied. “But we won’t be able to earn the money in one year. It’s no secret that our machinery is on its last legs and that we only just manage to keep it running.”

Blum stood up again with a groan.

“I agree that our machinery has got one foot in the soup, so to speak, but I think we can pull through with it somehow.”

“May I speak, please?” asked Sancho Zorin, raising his hand. “I say we can easily earn 300,000 in a year. Why, the money’s as good as ours! I’m sure everybody will agree with me.”

“We’ll” manage it,” the benches answered in support.

“And then with your help we shall have a new factory,” Zorin went on. “The only thing is what kind of factory? But that’s another matter. What I want to say now is that if we’ve got to raise the money first, even with you helping us, a year will have gone by, then another one on the building, so two years will be lost. That would be a pity. Everywhere now the Five-Year Plan \s being finished in three, even in two and a half years, and it’s up to us to do the same. Don’t you agree? I suggest we start building right away; we have some money, why shouldn’t we get going? Why leave the money lying idle? And you could also—er—well, you ‘know what U mean....”

“Give you the dibs right away?”

“Well, I wasn’t going to say right away... but more or less!”

Zorin looked at Kreutzer with so imploring an expression that everybody burst out laughing. Now many others too looked appealing at Kreutzer. He turned towards Zakharov and cocked a thumb at the children: “Just look at them,” he shouted. “How can I refuse them! All right, all right, you kids! I’ll let you have 400,000 today!”

Zakharov sprang to his feet, waved his arms, shouted something, gripped Kreutzer’s hand with youthful ardour, while all around the boys shouted and laughed and leaped up from their places.

“Order, order, comrades!” shrieked Torsky.

But Kreutzer waved his hand hopelessly: “How do you expect them to keep order, Vitya? We’re building a factory!”

Torsky really didn’t need to be told that this was a day on which too strict an observance of discipline would be out of place.

21

Tears in the Mechanical Shop

The whole colony was thrown into wild excitement by the new factory, even at this stage when it existed mainly in the imagination. The amazing thing was that this gift was not the last of the bounty which was being lavished on them by the fates.

One day Vitya Torsky came dashing into the dining-hall,

Secretary of the Commanders’ Council member of the Komsomol bureau, Vitya Torsky was’ a youth of steady and sober character but now he was quite beside himself with excitement, his hair ruffled, his arms waving.

“Wonderful news, you fellows!” he shouted. “I just can’t tell you how wonderful it is.”

This was literally true for he was gasping for breath and obviously could not get a word out.

Everyone jumped up from his place, fully aware that something quite out of the ordinary must have happened to have made Torsky forget himself so much as to shout.

“What’s happened? Come on, Vitya, tell us!”

“Kreutzer’s—given us—a lorry! A motor-lorry!”

“You’re pulling our legs!”

“But it’s there, in the yard, and a driver!”

Torsky made another frantic gesture and dashed out. The soup was forgotten; there was a wild rush for the door, the crash of feet on the staircase. Those who failed to push their way out of the room formed a happy jostling crowd at the windows.

No doubt about it, there in the factory-yard stood a brand-new lorry. The colonists surrounded it. Some of the fourth detachment managed to get on to the body. Even the

sturdy Gontar clutched at his heart. Near the driver's cabin stood a thin, swarthy, dark-eyed man who watched the boys apprehensively.

"Are you a mechanic?" Zyriansky called out to him.

"I'm a lorry-driver."

"What's your name?"

"Vorobyov."

"And your first name?"

"Pyotr."

"Hey, listen you, fellows! Up with driver Pyotr Vorobyov!"

It was a splendid idea. The boys rushed at Vorobyov from above out of the back of the lorry and from the ground. Something like a cheer was heard. Vorobyov had just enough time 'to start in alarm and turn pale but did not even manage to open his mouth. In a flash his thin legs and ample boots were kicking high above the crowd. Safely back on earth, he looked around and without putting his crumpled clothes in order asked in surprise: "What sort of folk are you?"

It was Gontar who answered. Squatting on his heels and using his hands to add emphasis, he said: "You see, Comrade Vorobyov, we are Soviet folk; real folk... the right sort... so you needn't worry!"

The boys of the fourth detachment, Vanya Galchenko among them, did not pay much attention to all this talk and emotional outbursts. After examining the body, they turned to the engine, found out what make and model it was, and after a short argument about other models came to a general agreement that the lorry was new and quite beyond compare with Blum's entire wealth of machines, including the Samara turning-lathes. The vision of the new factory and the reality of the new lorry combined to lower considerably their respect for the turning-lathes. The elation they had so recently derived from their participation in the noble trade of metal-working gave place to new feelings. Even Vanya Galchenko, never one to lose control of himself or indulge in whims, turned up in Zakharov's office during working-hours one day. He made an effort to speak in a business-like way and to restrain his tears—but, all the same, he cried.

"Look here, Alexei Stepanovich! Things can't go on like this!—The pulley's gone wrong—I've told him about it again and again."

"What's all the fuss about? All that needs to be done is to have the pulley repaired."

"They won't repair it. All he says is go on working! But how can I work like this?" "Come along then."

In the depths of misery, Vanya crossed the yard behind Zakharov. He was no longer crying. When they came to the mechanical-shop, he ran ahead of Zakharov to his lathe.

"Now Just watch," he said.

Vanya jumped on to the platform and set the lathe running. Then he pushed to the right a wooden stick hanging from the ceiling, which served as the hand-drive of the pulley. The lathe stopped.

"Well, I'm watching but I don't see anything," said Zakharov.

The machine suddenly began to run again, wheezing and groaning like all the other lathes in the mechanical-shop. Zakharov looked up. The hand-drive had swung free and was travelling to the left—the pulley had been set in motion.

Zakharov chuckled and looked at Vanya. "I see, so that's how it is..."

"It's impossible like this. I stop the machine, and just when I start to put the oil-can in the chuck, off it starts again. You could lose your hand that way. ... " Blum had already come up 'behind Zakharov. "How do you account for this, Solomon Davidovich? It's really going too far ..." complained Zakharov.

"What's up now?" Blum asked Vanya. "What about that tackle I fixed up for you?"

Vanya groped under the lathe and brought out a piece of rusty wire:

"Call that tackle?"

The length of wire had a loop at each end. One of them Vanya slipped over the hand-drive, the other he attached to a corner of the bed. The machine stopped. Then Vanya freed the loop on the bed and the lathe was off again, but the loop hung down right in front of Vanya's eyes.

"The last word in technical progress!" Porshnev's voice came from somewhere behind them.

Blum swung round aggressively, only to find Porshnev's face wreathed in a benign smile, and his eyes looking back at him from under bushy dark eyebrows with an expression that was mild and friendly.

"Word of honour, Blum, that won't do!" Porshnev exclaimed.

"Why not? I admit it isn't the last word in technical progress but all the same you can work with it!"

"Work? He has to stop that machine five times a minute. How can you expect him to hook and unhook that bit of wire all the time. Besides that, the loop jumps about in front of his eyes and gets in the way of the tool-rest."

Blum had only one comment.

"Of course, if you expect to have English-built lathes...."

"And what kind are these?" somebody shouted.

"They're not lathes at all. They're goats!" came the reply from another corner of the shop.

Zakharov shook his head sadly.

"All the same, Solomon Davidovich, it looks disgusting."

"Well, what do you expect me to do about it? There's nothing for it but a general overhaul."

Zakharov turned on his heel sharply and walked off. Blum looked at Vanya with reproachful eyes.

"What did you have to go and complain for? Do you think Volonchuk can't repair it?" he asked.

Shary was already on the scene. His dark face showed itself under Slum's arm.

"When are you going to make the overhaul?" he asked.

"We can't overhaul the whole place at once! You think a general overhaul is child's-play, don't you? A general overhaul is a general overhaul, let me tell you."

"But if it's got to be done?"

"What's got to be done is edging oil-cans, as far as you're concerned. What are you nagging me about a general overhaul for? Volonchuk will find a nut and screw it on."

"What's the good of a nut? The whole lathe's got the staggers, the support's done in."

"You're not the only one in the shop. Volonchuk will screw on a nut and it'll work, you'll see."

Volonchuk did in fact get down to the job five minutes later. He came up to Shary carrying a wooden box where he kept material for curing the ailments of all machines. Filka heaved a sigh of relief. But Blum was not to enjoy his peace of mind for long. Within a minute he pounced on Boris Yanovsky.

"Why aren't you working?" he demanded.

Yanovsky turned away in injured silence.

There were some things that put even Blum out of countenance. He shouted angrily at Volonchuk:

"This is outrageous, Comrade Volonchuk! Why are you messing about there with that fool of a 'nut? Can't you see that Yanovsky's pulley isn't working? D'you think the pulley can stop and Yanovsky can stop but that I'm going on paying you your wages?"

As he went on fumbling for something in his wonder-working box, Volonchuk replied grimly:

"That pulley ought to have been scrapped long ago."

"Scrapped! What are you talking about? Scrap a pulley like that! What a rich lot you all think you are, damn you! That pulley's got a good ten years' life left in it, you might as well know! Climb up there right away and fix a spline in it!"

"It'll go on chattering all the same."

"You're the one who chatters! Do what I tell you at once!"

Volonchuk looked up, scratched his head, put the ladder into position with deliberation, and climbed up to reach the pulley.

"We fixed it only yesterday...."

"That was yesterday, now it's today. You got your wages for yesterday and you'll *get* them again today, won't you?"

Blum looked up too. But Shary tugged at his sleeve.

"What about me?"

"I've already told you, you'll get your nut all right."

"But now he's gone off up there...."

"You just wait..."

Suddenly from the farthest corner of the shop came Sadovnichy's despairing cry: "That belt's .snapped again. Why the hell can't they get a harness-maker?"

And there was Blum, wise and knowing and energetic as ever, standing beside Sadovnichy.

"The harness-maker was here the other day. I told him to put all the belts in order. Where were you that day?"

"He put .some stitches in it but now it's gone in another place. We need a harness-maker here permanently, it seems to me."

"Yes, that would suit you, wouldn't it? Today it's a harness-maker, tomorrow it'll be a special man to do the lubricating and the next thing you'll be asking for is a charwoman!"

Sadovnichy threw his wrench down on the window-sill and made to leave.

"Where do you think you're going?" Blum asked him.

"What's there for me to do? I'll wait till the harness-maker comes."

"Do you mean to say you can't sew a belt yourself? It's easy enough."

This really set the mechanical-shop laughing at last. Even Sadovnichy was laughing when he exclaimed:

"But it's a belt, Solomon Davidovich, it isn't a boot's upper!"

Sadovnichy knew what he was talking about for in the past he had once worked for a cobbler.

22

Blum Gives His Word

What sort of new factory they were going to have was a mystery even to Zakharov. But everybody knew that 300,000 roubles had to be earned in a year. That was going to be no easy matter, for now that the colony had been "taken off the account" all its expenses had to be covered by what Blum's factory could earn. To his own surprise Blum became the only source of income. The first to suffer was the doctor who did not get his blue lamp. Then the girls of the fifth and eleventh detachments, who had long been counting on new woollen skirts, suddenly realized that there would not be any. In the library hundreds of books which had been parcelled ready for sending to the binders were put back on the shelves. Malenky who asked Zakharov for 100 roubles for his rowing-car was told he would have to wait.

Zakharov put the matter in a nutshell at a general meeting:

"You must be prepared to" tighten your belts, comrades!"

Everybody agreed to the belt-tightening. Even in the dormitories there was little talk about reduced waistlines. In the fourth detachment main attention was given to the affairs of the mechanical-shop. Three hundred thousand roubles had to be earned, but the machines were bad—that was the chief topic that came up for serious discussion. The other detachments too were terribly worried about how the money was to be earned. There seemed to be no solution, yet it was a fact that the day after Kreutzer's visit the output of oil-cans rose by one half. Not even Blum could make out how that happened.

He went over the figures several times but they were correct—50 per cent up. He said nothing to Zakharov about his discovery but waited a day or two, during which time output continued to mount. And as it mounted so did the number of protests made in the shop against the many shortcomings. Then it was found that they were not getting enough castings. They would have to increase the number of mould-boxes that was clear. The matter was raised several times at general meetings, each time more urgently. It ended in a row.

“Now, about this matter of the .mould-boxes¹,” Zyriansky began, calmly enough at first. “The ones we have are old, full of holes and, what’s more, there aren’t enough of them. Thousands of times, say thousands of times, Solomon Davidovich has promised: tomorrow, in a week, in two weeks.... And let’s see what happens every morning. The turners bolt their breakfast—some don’t even breakfast at all—to rush off to the foundry. Those who get there early manage to grab enough oil-cans, but if you come later there aren’t any and you have to wait till the morning output cools. What sort of technique do you call that?”

Another surprise! Zorin, who is a carpenter and has nothing to do with metal-work, puts a word in:

“Solomon Davidovich is too mean to spend a thousand roubles on mould-boxes. But if the whole plan’s in danger, what then?”

Blum lost patience.

“I want to say something about this too. What’s all the fuss about, after all? Do you think I don’t understand about these mould-boxes? We’ll soon have them.”

.”When? Tell us that!” several voices cried. “In a fortnight.”

Zyriansky narrowed his eyes cunningly:

“That means the 15th of October, doesn’t it?” he asked.

“I said a fortnight. That makes the 1st of October.”

“I see, the 15th of October for certain.”

“No. the 1st of October for certain.”

Smiles began to spread round the room. Blum struck a pose, stretching one arm forward.

“By the 1st of October, I give my word of honour,” he declared solemnly.

There was a sudden burst of laughter and even Zakharov smiled. The colour rushed to Slum’s cheeks he pouted and went to the middle of the room.

“You are insulting me! What right have you kids to insult an old man like me?”

There was an awkward silence. What next? Zyriansky, however, came to the middle too and turned to Blum with a serious look. Frowning he said: “Nobody means to insult you, Solomon Davidovich. You affirm that the mould-boxes will be ready by the 1st of October, and I say they won’t be ready even by the 15th.”

He remained standing in front of Blum looking at him fixedly. Blum looked around the meeting with bloodshot eyes, suddenly turned on his heel and left the room. In the

hush that followed Mark Grinhaus's indignant voice could be heard: "We can't allow that, Alexei! It's not fair to treat a man like that. Why, he gave his word of honour!"

Now it was Zyriansky's eyes that filled with anger. He shook *his* fist vehemently.

"And I'm giving my word, too," he shouted. "If I'm proved wrong, you can turn me out of the colony."

"You're wrong all the same," came unexpectedly from Volenko. "That remains to be seen."

"And I tell you you're wrong. It's no good arguing about it; we all very well know that the mould-boxes won't be ready by the 1st of October."

"That's just what I'm spying, don't you see?"

"No, I don't see. Solomon Davidovich at this moment believes, yes, really believes that they will be ready. And he's doing his best. There's no question of his lying. And you, Alyosha, you go and insult him like you did just now! An old man like that!"

"I didn't insult him. I argued with him."

"Arguing one thing and insulting someone's another. I'm not saying you purposely ..."

"Oh drop it, Volenko. We're talking about mould-boxes, about work, and you as usual butt in with your soft-hearted pap. According to you everybody's good and nobody ought to be "insulted. I look on things another way: we need .mould-boxes—give us mould-boxes, talk business,—when will they be ready, and why go on making fools of the whole colony? Why, I ask you?"

The meeting; was following this conversation with intense interest. It was not easy to tell from the colonists' expressions whose part they were taking. Zyriansky seemed to be right, yet insults ought not to be thrown around like that. Igor Chernyavin, sitting on the bench between Nesterenko and Zorin, also felt like putting in his opinion, but he was not yet used to speaking at meetings and, moreover, it was not quite clear to him what his opinion was. He had always felt sorry for Blum, who was everybody's target, always being pestered for something, kept on the hop from early morning till bedtime. On the other hand Igor thoroughly appreciated the colonists' constant captious grumbling about Blum's "factory." Take, for instance, the assembly-shop. At present the whole yard was cluttered up with lumber. But what lumber it was! Blum had picked up somewhere, obviously on the cheap, several lorry-loads of oak scrap. It was undoubtedly the poorest quality: full of knots and snags, it meant that every chair-strut would have a split in it. All these defects ought to have been avoided back in the machine-shop but Ruslan Gorokhov said with an oath that Blum, far from encouraging them to dodge the knots and cracks, insisted that there should be no waste. Of course it was on Wanda that all hopes were pinned in these circumstances. Wanda could work miracles with her paste; all the same, it was too much to expect entire chairs to be made of it. Igor Chernyavin suddenly made up his mind to speak and raised his hand. Torsky gave him the floor. Looks of surprise came from all parts of the room. Chernyavin, still only a probationer, wanting to speak!

Igor .stood up boldly but had only to open his mouth to discover how difficult it was to address a general meeting.

"Comrades!" he began. "What's going on is no good at all. Here's Wanda Stadnitskaya taking up mere shavings and producing theatre-seats out of them for you.

Take, for instance, the question of chair-struts. Pick one up and you'll find, I'm telling you ..."

"Keep to the subject," Torsky butted in.

"What did you say?"

"What are you babbling about struts for? You're supposed to be talking about Zyriansky's statement."

"Well, that's just it. But the situation has to be taken into consideration. Please consider the situation."

"The situation of what?" Zorin asked from the bench.

Igor, with the corner of his eye, caught Zorin's malicious smile and made a brave gesture with his arm. But, drat it, it turned out to be as clumsy as one of Gontar's gestures: up went his arm with suitable force behind it, but somehow it went the wrong way and then stopped, sticking out in front of him in a most ridiculously stiff and uncomfortable pose. Igor's eyes were drawn to it, but he just then detected one of the girls smiling at him archly. Whatever happened he 'had to say something! At that moment he felt his forehead break out in beads of sweat, raised his arm to wipe it with his sleeve, and, to his own surprise, heaved a deep sigh. A gust of light, barely audible laughter arose and was carried away beyond the walls of the Quiet Room. Igor raised his eyes, stood listening, sighed once more and—sat down.

Now the laughter swelled to a gale. Stung to anger Igor leapt up and shouted: "What are you laughing about? You never stop chivvying the fellow with your mould-boxes, give us mould-boxes! Do you suppose Solomon Davidovich has an easy time? You talk about earning 300,000 a year, but a hell of a lot you'd earn without Solomon Davidovich! You still drink tea in the morning..."

"So do you!" someone interjected.

"Yes, so do I and what about it? While we're still having our morning tea he's on his way to town and no sooner is he back than we're at him hammer-and-tongs. Do you call that a life, I'd like to know? As for me, I respect Solomon Davidovich, word of honour I do!"

Then a surprising thing happened. The colonists suddenly broke into applause. At first Igor could not believe his ears when he heard this totally unexpected reaction to his speech. He looked around. There was no doubt about it, the applause was for him, though he noticed that people's faces still wore sarcastic smiles.

The colour rushed to Igor's cheeks, he wanted to hide himself, but Nesterenko nudged him hard and said: "Well done, Igor, you're a good fellow!"

Igor heard Zakharov speaking, heard his own name being mentioned.

"Chernyavin put into words what we are all thinking," Zakharov began. "As Zyriansky rightly says, mould-hexes are important. But the man is more important, my friends! I respect you, Volenko, for standing up for an old man. I think the time has come to have a serious talk about Solomon Davidovich. But I want you to keep what I have to say strictly between ourselves. Can you manage that?"

Zakharov paused and, with a smile, looked round the meeting. All faces reflected but a single thought: any secret would be quite safe in the keeping of these two hundred colonists. Someone stole a doubtful glance at the girls, only to evoke a decisive protest from one of their number: "What are you looking 'this way for? I wouldn't vouch for your tongue...."

"Ah! You wouldn't?"

Zakharov knew that his secret would be kept.

"Well, I see you won't tell Solomon Davidovich about what I'm going to say, that's all right then. Well, this is it let's come to an agreement. We're quite right in calling him to order, we must get him-to make a general overhaul, and to turn out high quality production, and to provide new mould-boxes too. We've got to do that. But let's agree to do all that in a friendly way or at any rate quite politely. Remember, some people find it very difficult to be polite, good manners have to be learnt. You shouldn't imagine that because a man's polite he's weak-kneed. Nothing of the sort!

For example, you can gesticulate and glare and shout: 'Get the hell out of here, you so-and-so, but you can also say politely: 'Be so kind as to leave the room.'

Zakharov, in truth, delivered himself of this last remark with exquisite politeness, even accompanying it with a slight bow, but the insistence with which it was spoken was so convincing that the meeting could not contain itself. Amidst the laughter someone said: "That works if it's among ourselves."

"Quite correct. I'm talking about our own folk. But with outsiders too it's not a matter of cursing them but of showing strength. A rifle is better than an oath. But Solomon Davidovich is one of us, we all know that very well, and Chernyavin was right in what he said. Our factory equipment is obsolete and primitive, it's hard for those who work on it, but it's no easy matter for the manager either. Is that clear, kids?"

And clear it really was. Only Zyriansky left the room with discontent written on his face.

"Well, we'll see what he'll produce by the 1st of October," he kept on muttering.

Chernyavin, on the other hand, could not contain his joy as he dashed upstairs. Had he not made a pretty good speech, his first at the colony, and one with which Zakharov had agreed? A good thing, for didn't they take him to be nothing out of the usual run of new boys? Probationer Chernyavin, indeed! For some time Igor had felt ill at ease. Vanya Galchenko was a good lad, but he'd entered the colony a month after Igor and had already been given his badge. Nobody in the eighth detachment had raised the question of Chernyavin getting his. They treated' him decently there, gave him credit for being well-read and agreed that his comments on many aspects of life were just, but not a single soul had ever mentioned the possibility of Chernyavin being presented to a general meeting with the words: he's all right as a fellow, he lives, works, studies. Could it be that they all remembered that ill-fated kiss in the park before 'the show? Or his refusal to work when he first arrived?

Surprisingly enough, Chernyavin's mind was still on this subject When Nesterenko said: "I've been thinking, chaps, that Chernyavin's been a probationer long enough. Maybe he still has a few tricks up his sleeve but I think they'll disappear of their own

accord. What do we want with probationers in our detachment? What do you think, Sancho?"

Sancho Zorin, the sly fox that he is, exclaims in a voice full of surprise:

"Why, that's what I've been thinking for a long time! You're quite right, why should we have any probationers?"

23

In Life Everything Is Possible

When Kreutzer next visited the colony he brought a fat man with him. Kreutzer showed him everything but mostly the boys themselves.

"Just look at that fellow. Have you seen anything like him? Come along, Kiryusha, come and show yourself. How's life treating you?"

Kiryusha Novak could have found something to say about his life but when his eyes fell on the fat man all willingness to speak deserted him. The fat man's clean-shaven expressive face showed nothing but an ill-concealed disgust.

"You don't understand anything yet, my dear fellow," Kreutzer said to him.

"I'm an engineer, Mikhail Osipovich," the fat man replied in a tired bass voice. "I don't have to understand all this romantic business"

"D'you hear that, Kiryusha?" Kreutzer asked, laughing a little. "Apparently you're a romantic being."

Novak blinked for the sake of agreement and ran away. Begunok, who had just given the signal for a Commanders' Council, came up to learn the news.

"What did the old buffer say to you?"

"Nothing much. He said 'he was an engineer.'"

The Commanders' Council room was crammed to overflowing. The rumour had spread through the colony that it was to tell them about the new factory that the engineer had come down. Among the first to settle down on the bench was Vanya Galchenko. There were many grown ups too, teachers, foremen, even Volonchuk who planted himself in a corner and surveyed the room with a look of boredom and suspicion.

Kreutzer narrowed his eyes as he surveyed the colonists, exchanged winks with Zakharov and said: "Well, the position is this, you kids. Things are on the move. Let me introduce engineer Pyotr Petrovich Vorgunov. We have a plan that concerns the new factory, an interesting plan, a very interesting one. We in town think it's a pretty good plan. The idea is to use the factory, the new one, I mean, for making electric tools. Please carry on, Pyotr Petrovich."

Engineer Vorgunov occupied the whole of Torsky's desk. He looked ponderous and grim. He ignored Kreutzer's glance and never looked at the colonists. His large, head, streaked here and there with grey, moved slowly. He opened a small attaché case and drew out of it a neat gleaming apparatus like a large revolver. With some difficulty he balanced it in his hands and began to speak in a quiet, toneless voice, clearly showing that he was just doing his duty.

“This is an electric drill, a drill, that is to say, run by electricity. Here is the lead which may be plugged into an ordinary socket... .”

He plugged in the lead and the tool suddenly began to buzz as the drill turned at a speed impossible to judge by sight, only to be guessed at.

“As you see, it works right in your hands and very conveniently too, for you can drill with it in any direction. This is a highly important tool, especially in aircraft construction, army engineering and ship-building work. But it can also be used as a stationary drill, by attaching it to a stand which I did not bring with me. If you know anything at all about electricity you will surmise that there must be electrical armature inside it, as I will show you later on. There are other electric tools which this factory—er—this colony will be expected to make, such as electric grinding tools, saws and planes. Up to now no power tools have been produced in the Soviet Union, we have had to buy them from Austria or from America. The one I am ‘holding is of Austrian make.”

Vorgunov then nimbly dismantled the drill, with no apparent effort, and pointed out its components, briefly enumerating the machines which would be needed to manufacture them. All these machines had unfamiliar names though he did make passing reference to turning-lathes.

“There will be four shops,” he concluded. “Foundry, mechanical, assembly and instrument shops. If there is anything that is not clear, please ask me about it.”

He laid the drill on the desk and sat with his eyes fixed on it as he patiently awaited the questions. So shattering had been his announcement, so enthralled were his audience, that they found it difficult to frame any questions at all. Volenko, however, raised one.

“Will our present foundry be suitable?” he asked.

The question was so ridiculous that everybody turned reproachful eyes upon Volenko.

“No, it won’t,” replied Vorgunov without looking up.

Zyriansky was not discouraged from asking another question.

“You mentioned the question of—er—precision— precision during the machining,” he said. “What degree of precision, please?” “Ten microns.”

“Oh, help!” exclaimed Zyriansky, clasping his brow as he fell back into his seat.

Even Zakharov, even Volonchuk joined in the general laughter. Vorgunov alone remained unmoved. He began putting the drill back into its case.

“But will—er—will we be able to make it?” Vorgunov compressed his lips and looked somewhere over their heads.

“That I don’t know,” he replied tersely. The colonists became squint-eyed with embarrassment. Nobody wanted to catch the others’ glances. But Zakharov rose, took a step forward—and also lowered his eyes. It was obvious that he was angry.

“Well, I do know! And Comrade Kreutzer knows too! And so do you all, colonists! These power-drills are needed by our country, by our Red Army and by our Air Force. What output have you allowed for in the project, Comrade Vorgunov?”

“Fifty a day is the norm.”

“That means we shall make one hundred a day. And we shall make better ones than the Austrians do.”

He looked challengingly at the engineer, but the latter was coldly eyeing his attaché case. A voice rang out from the heart of the crowd around the door: “We’ll make them all right!”

Gontar’s face assumed the grave virtuous look seen on elderly people who have learned wisdom in their lives: “I read in a book the other day that some folk have invented a way of sending pictures by telegraph. I’m sure that drill is easier to make than that. Or take combines, say. They make those too now. I saw it being done myself in Rostov. My opinion is that if we tackle the job the right way we can make them. Of course, we’ll need a decent foundry.”

None of this sound talk made the slightest impression on Vorgunov. Vitya Torsky, scrutinizing him in surprise, closed the conference.

A few minutes later Vorgunov stood in the middle of Zakharov’s office, his head down as if he was ready to butt.

“I don’t go in for this tender-heartedness,” he was saying. “I’m not an angel or a sentimental young lady and I don’t allow my feelings to be touched by any children when there’s a question of production involved. Certainly not! What I’ve got to say is this: Build your factory, that’s all right, but you’ll have to look around for your workers.”

Kreutzer’s eyes grew round with surprise.

“Hold on Petrovich. What about these lads ...is it your opinion...”

“There are enough bunglers without them,” the engineer said with a shrug.

Blum gesticulated in violent indignation. “You don’t know what they’re capable of yet,” he demurred.

They work like wolves, yes they do!”

“That’s it! Like wolves! It’s not wolves we want, its experienced workers.”

Vorganov put his hat on and picked up his attaché case. “I shall go back in your car, Mikhail Osipovich, Good evening,” he said, and left.

They all looked after him.

“You see! Splendid, isn’t he? He’s a wonderful fellow Kertzner enthused.

But Blum apparently did not share his enthusiasm.

“How do like that? Doesn’t like wolves! Have you ever seen anybody like that before?”

Zakharov laughed like a little boy.

In the fourth detachment dormitory most of the boys were already asleep. Zyriansky alone was reading in bed, and besides him, Begunok and Vanya were staring at each other from their adjacent beds. Vanya suddenly raised himself on an elbow. “Ten microns!” he exclaimed. “He can’t have meant that, can he?”

“In life everything’s possible,” Begunok replied pensively.

Zyriansky looked in their direction.

“Go to sleep, you kids!”

The lads pulled comic faces at each other shut their eyes and fell asleep.

24

For Old Times Sake

Vorgunov took the Austrian power-drill away with him but the memory of it remained to fascinate the colony.

The colonists, to tell the truth, did not quite know how to approach the subject. Arguments arose whether the dressmaking-shop would be closed or not, whether the Samara lathes would be any use in the new factory and whether the stadium ought to be demolished or left standing. Several of the girls requested the Commanders' Council to transfer them to the mechanical-shop. The Council welcomed this initiative but the fourth detachment eyed it with jealous suspicion.

“Oh, those girls are a cunning lot!” commented Petka Kravchuk with a defiant toss of his forelock. “Later on we'll hear them saying that because it's so unusual for girls to be working on turning-lathes they ought to be given the best machines, while we kids are only good enough to make cores. Especially if there's no smoke in the foundry.”

The fourth detachment agreed with Kravchuk. In the older girls' intrusion they saw a grave risk to their own standing as turners. Their worries, however, were dissipated as soon as the girls took their place among them.

Wanda and Oksana were among those who moved to the mechanical-shop. Blum did raise the point with the Commanders' Council that Wanda was irreplaceable as a paste-maker in the assembly-shop, but Wanda said she wanted to work with Oksana. Coming from anyone else such a reason would not have been taken seriously but as it involved Oksana and Wanda nobody laughed at it. On the contrary it settled the matter.

The friendship that had arisen between Oksana Wanda had been noticed by the whole colony and there was tacit agreement that it was something quite out of the ordinary. Nobody, however, knew what gave this friendship its special character and the girls themselves revealed none of its riddle. People grew 'accustomed to seeing them constantly together: in the dining-hall, at school, and now in the factory. They devoted their free time to each other's company. They appeared together in the park, in the theatre, on the playgrounds, much to the inconvenience of those who wished to pay special attention to either one of them. Both Gontar and Ohernyavin, though each in his own way, and without admitting it to the other, strongly disapproved of this friendship. Only when it resulted in the discomfort of one of the rivals did the other commend it. Particularly perplexing was the fact that the two girls scarcely ever spoke to each other in the presence of others. It was clear that the girls were fully content with this ingenuous, silent and somewhat serious intimacy, but it was also obvious that in different circumstances, perhaps in the dormitory, or in the depths of the park, the girls must find things to talk about and solve all their problems and see everything quite clearly. That must be the reason why they were so quiet, calm and proud in the company of others. Oksana's face was the livelier and more impressionable of the two. While remaining faithful to her friend she could associate herself with her surroundings and pay attention to everything

that was going on. Wanda, on the other hand, was little interested in the life around her. She lived in some rich inner world of her own, even contracting her eyebrows a little in her absorption with it.

Wanda found the colony more and more to her liking. She was beginning to understand its people better, though she could not as yet act on a simple and sincere impulse to draw closer to them. She gradually fathomed all the colony's secrets. One of the first to be revealed was why the girls had so many pillows, and it turned out to be something quite simple, funny even. For some reason only the girls were in the secret, the boys always puzzling their heads about this strange affair and even going so far as to suspect the administration of unfairness. The secret was as follows; every week there was a change of bed-clothes and when this was going on the boys never noticed that as they removed the pillowcases a few feathers were left in each one. The feathers would drift about and settle on the floor to be swept into the passage later by the monitor. The monitors should then have removed them, but never did. Early in the morning, long before reveille, the girls would gather the feathers and as a result their own pillows grew fatter and fatter until the time came for the birth of a new pillow. The boys' pillows, on the other hand, grew skimpier and skimpier until the time came when the supply-manager had reluctantly to report their inexplicable condition and conclude that he would again have to buy feathers to stuff the pillows. And as there were considerably more boys than girls in the colony the process took a swift course. It was not long before Wanda had her little store of feathers and down, which she kept carefully wrapped up in a handkerchief in her bedside locker. It was all part of the daily round and if anyone deserved blame it was the boys alone for not being capable of looking after such trifling things as their pillows.

Wanda's locker was beginning to fill up. She, like all colonists, earned wages for work in the factory. By the end of October hers had amounted to 120 roubles. Most of this went to the colony to pay for her board, while- ten per cent was paid into the special fund of the Commanders' Council to provide grants for colonists on leaving. Wanda herself received between twenty and twenty-five roubles, a very large sum for her, and one which she had found difficult to spend because her desires were few at this stage. But when Oksana joined her, ways of spending the money presented themselves. 'Sweets suddenly became desirable, then silk stockings began to beckon to her, then she discovered the pleasure of giving Oksana presents. Now in Wanda's locker too appeared a cambric dress length, and a box full of odds and ends; she also played with the idea of acquiring a wrist watch like Klava Kashirina's. The vision of the watch, however, grew fainter and fainter as she discovered more pressing shopping needs. After all there was a large clock in the vestibule to tell the time by 'if you were too impatient to wait for the bugle-call.

One day towards the end of October, Wanda received permission to go to town. Oksana these days was entirely absorbed in the work of the biology circle and talked all the time about African anti-cyclones and such things. Igor Chernyavin too had joined the biology circle. He was, if the truth were known, not in the least interested in African anti-cyclones, and even less in guinea-pigs and numerous" caged-birds, but he found something nice and jolly in that circle, while there were many opportunities for cracking jokes and no Lack of simple jobs which he did with special pleasure if Oksana noticed his efforts. In all events, the biology circle had the advantage of having nothing whatsoever

in common with the principles of engine construction or traffic regulations—Misha Gontar's presence there was absolutely excluded.

Oksana stayed behind to work in the circle, so Wanda went to town on her own. She walked along the road through the woods, caught a tram and rode as far as the main street. It was a serene October day. Wearing her black regulation overcoat and a beret with the colony badge on it, she walked proudly down the street. People looked with respect at this lovely golden-headed member of the famous First of May Colony. A Sunday crowd was strolling under the trees at one end of the street, where it was lined with gardens. With neat precision, Wanda stepped past the broad lines of people walking through the park and¹ took pleasure in noticing frow faces lit up with curiosity and envy and how young people made way for her. Occasionally she would catch a whispered remark: "There's something smart 'about .those colonists. They even have their own way of walking, d'you notice?"

Here in this holiday atmosphere it was even nicer than in the colony. Not a single person in this street knew anything about Wanda Stadnitskaya. Those shoulders, over which the fair curly hair streamed, bore all the purity and pride of her youth, of the colony she belonged to, and because of that she trod the pavement lightly and trimly. How fine it felt to place her feet, clad in their small black shoes, firmly and freely before her, to breathe in deep calm and to look around with assurance!

"Hullo, dearie...."

The voice came from behind her. She felt as if someone "had dealt her a mean, heavy blow on the head. Something shapeless and disgusting seemed to awaken and possess her whole body.

And now a colonist stood in front of her. He wore the same dark overcoat and even the way he held himself was that of a colonist but for those unblinking green eyes. ...

"Where are you going?" Ryzhikov asked.

Wanda gasped for air, felt herself choking, and for a brief moment there rose in her that old unbridled hatred. Her eyes flashed—but she remembered where she was and that they .were both colonists.

"Shopping," she replied. "I've some things to buy—for Oksana and for myself. Where are you off to?"

"Oh, nowhere in particular."

He started walking beside her, and really on this day he looked decent: his coat was buttoned, his black regulation hat firmly planted on his head.

"I hear you're working in the turnery now."

"Yes,"

"That's no place for women."

"What do you think women ought to do then?"

"Oh, they've got their own things to do—anyway—it won't do you any good...."

He leered and in a flash Ryzhikov ceased to be a colonist and was transformed before her eyes.

But Wanda did not forget that she was in town.

"Leave me alone ... go away!" she whispered without a change of expression.

"There's no need to get angry. What's the matter? Can't a fellow have a bit of fun? You know "what?"

"Well."

"Let's go to a restaurant."

She said nothing. She walked on beside him mechanically.

He walked on a little in silence, then looked at her *and* said:

"We could have a drink. . . ."

When she replied it was with open contempt:

"And afterwards? What are you thinking of doing then? ..."

He laughed soundlessly and shrugged his shoulders in his old street-arab manner:

"Afterwards we shall see. Maybe we'll have the old days back again, eh?"

They went on in silence. At the cross-roads he cast a meaningful look at the entrance to a basement restaurant.

"Come on in, for old times' sake..." he breathed.

Wanda glanced up and down the street, leant a little closer to him and looking him straight in the eyes, spat out:

"Go to hell with those old days of yours, you dirty scum!"

He sprang back and struck his familiar arrogant pose.

"What's come over you?" he cried. "Quite the lady, aren't you? You'd better look out: they'll be hearing something about you in the colony!"

A man who had just passed by turned round. Wanda blushed deeply and hurried quickly into a side street. Ryzhikov remained transfixed in the restaurant door.

Ryzhikov found everything in the colony splendid. He nearly always in gay spirits, a great talker, .always cutting in on conversations between the detachments' leading lights about colony affairs, and usually with something worth while to say. He earned one of the ladling places in the foundry .and had recently been put to work on casting. Foreman Sankovsky had a high opinion of his ability and energy. There was a slight brush between Ryzhiikov and Nesterenko when the latter insisted that he stop swearing. Ryzhikov spurned Nesterenko's authority. "What next, I'd like to know? So you're going to start telling me what to do."

"Very well, you' can I have it out with your commander." "I will, too. D'you think you can scare me?" Volenko did raise the question that evening. "Nesterenko told me . . ." he began. "It was really nothing at all," Ryzhikov cut him short with an injured expression. "Naturally when there aren't enough mould-boxes, well, (I get angry and — you know how it is — I swear."

"You mustn't, Ryzhikov, I've told you that several times."

"I know. D'you think I don't? It's just a habit I've formed'"

“You’d better get out of that habit then. Is it so hard to do?”

“Do you think it’s so easy? Easy enough not to swear in free time, of course, but when we have trouble with those mould-boxes . . . How many times haven’t I had to say that the edges are spoiled or the wire’s twisted? How can you help swearing, Task you?”

“Well, promise me you’ll control yourself.”

“I promise, but sometimes, you know, I get mad....”

Volenko kept on at Ryzhikov but he understood how difficult it was for him to break with the past. On the whole Ryzhikov was well behaved; what redounded most to his credit was that he was considered one of the best shock-workers in the foundry. He was already earning a wage: last pay day netted him nearly fifty roubles.

“What do you think I ought to spend this on?” he asked Volenko, as he handled the money.

“Why spend it at all?” Volenko replied. “You’ve got everything you want. If I were you I’d put it into the savings bank. It’ll come in useful when you leave.”

It was only in school that things went badly for Ryzhikov. He sat in the 4th form, went off to sleep during lessons, never did his homework and only abstained from falling out with the teacher because he was somewhat afraid of the class-monitor, the grim unbending Khariton Savchenko.

Ryzhikov was also beginning to make friends. True, Ruslan Gorokhov pretended that he had no time to spend with him talking about this and that, besides which Ruslan was in the 6th form and his classmates used to come to him to go over their lessons together. And though Ryzhikov was suspicious about lessons of any kind, he had to admit that the 6th form was a serious matter and it might well be necessary to learn one’s lessons there. Anyway there would be time for Gorokhov later: he was one of Ryzhikov’s own sort. He found other friends. Seva Levitin, for instance, he was even more satisfactory as a chum than Gorokhov, being two years younger than Ryzhikov and recognizing his authority with something of a servile worship. Levitin was a bit different from the rest because he was so well read. He always had a book in his hand and loved to tell all kinds of stories that he had read in it. Sometimes he brought back from town special thrillers which he kept hidden in his locker and showed only to Ryzhikov. Levitin’s most striking characteristic; however, was his hatred of the colony. Even Ryzhikov was at a loss to understand why Levitin grew so angry about the colony though he enjoyed listening to his complaints and insinuations. Levitin had a fleshy face with full lips and when he spoke both face and lips grew moist, which seemed to make his words more spiteful. Levitin despised all colony rules, the discipline, the uniform, the cleanliness of the place, the factory work. He was certain that Blum had stolen tens of thousands of roubles and intended now to steal still more on the building of the new factory. Zakharov, in his opinion, was doing everything he could to win a state decoration and would get one, of course, because there were over two hundred colonists working for him. Levitin knew all about the friendships between the men and women teachers and could provide the most juicy details about their carryings-on. One day he went further than Ryzhikov could stand. “It’s not true...” he demurred. “Zakharov’s just giving himself airs, that’s all. As for robbing the colony, it’s not as easy as you think. They have bookkeepers and all sorts of control.”

But Levitin brushed these remarks aside contemptuously. He had been in many children's homes and at one of them everything had come to light and the director put on trial. At another one everybody stole. His own father, a cashier, was still in prison and he too was a man whom everybody had thought honest until a little matter of 30,000 roubles came to light. Ryzhikov was quite wrong to think the world was full of simpletons. Given the opportunity, everyone will steal and only try to pretend that he is honest.

Ryzhikov could not agree fully with Levitin. He knew life better and understood much more about human nature. Of course the opportunity to steal came everybody's way, and everybody liked getting money or possessions without having to work for them. Yet there were all kinds of riff-raff who would spend their entire life in poverty and yet not steal, because they were afraid to. They'd rather eat black bread than go to prison. Only very daring people stole those who were afraid of nothing and who didn't care a damn for prison. Ryzhikov took pride in being one of these exceptional fearless souls himself. He felt some contempt for Levitin whom he classified among the riff-raff, a fellow who didn't know how to steal but only to jaw. All the same he rather liked talking to him.

One day Ryzhikov and Levitin found themselves alone in the dormitory.

"It's not fair!" Levitin complained in his usual injured manner. "Wanda's only been here two months but she's already been given a lathe. And I'm still in the carpenter-shop. Do you call that fair?"

"You don't know our Wanda," Ryzhikov replied with a Jeer. "She knows how to make herself popular."

"And what about me? Why can't I?"

"You?" Ryzhikov chortled. "You haven't a chance. Would you like to know what Wanda did before she came here?"

"What?"

Though they were alone in the room Ryzhikov leaned to Levitin's ear and dropped his voice to a whisper.

"You're making it up!"

"Word of honour! I knew her myself."

"Oh, I say, that's something worth knowing," Levitin chuckled.

Levitin was delighted with his newly acquired knowledge but Ryzhikov's face remained expressionless.

"What's special about that?" Ryzhikov said with a shrug. "There's nothing bad in it. She's not the only one who...."

"And to think she gives herself such airs now— nobody would imagine that . . ."

"There's nothing bad in it," repeated Ryzhikov.

Early November found the colony deeply involved in preparations for the coming national holiday. There was, in fact, little enough time to spare on them, for the days were

chock-full with work. Not a minute was wasted, every second was important. Then came the evening when Lyuba Rotshtein found the note. It was tucked into the book she had just drawn from the library. Lyuba scanned it quickly.

"I say, girls, what a filthy thing! Lida, look at this," she exclaimed.

Lida Talikova took the note from her hand. She read the neatly-penned words: "Ask Wanda Stadnitskaya what she used to do before she came to the colony and how she earned her living."

At the same moment Semyon Gaidovsky was on his way along the downstairs passage from the library. The title of the book that had just been given him was so fascinating that though he meant to read it carefully during the holidays he could not resist taking a look at the illustrations as he strolled along. He failed to notice the slip of paper that dropped from the book, and walked on. Oleg Rogov picked up the note and read: "Fellows! You can have Wanda Stadnitskaya on the cheap. She knows what's what!"

"Where did you get this from?" Rogov asked Gaidovsky.

"What?"

"This note."

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"I saw you drop it."

"Perhaps it fell out of the book."

"Well, where did you get the book from?"

"I've just taken it out of the library. What's in the note?"

Rogov did not reply. He dashed into the Commanders' Council room.

"Look what's going on here!"

On the desk before Vitya Torsky lay several similar notes.

"I've been looking at them for half an hour. Yours is the fourth," he said.

A little later, Torsky posted Begunok at the door and conferred with Zyriansky and Mark Grinhaus. The former did not take long to sum up the situation. He read the notes through quickly and said without hesitation: "This is Levitin's work."

"Are you sure?" asked Grinhaus.

"Quite sure. Levitin and I share a desk. It's his handwriting. You remember what he wrote on the lavatory wall about Marusya?"

"But how could he have put them inside the books?"

"That'd be easy enough. He belongs to the library circle."

Without comment Torsky sent Begunok for Levitin. He came in, slid a glance over the notes on the desk, and slyly avoided Torsky's 'stern inquisitorial eyes and asked with measured respect: "Did you want to see me?"

"Is this your work?" Torsky demanded with a glance at his desk.

"I don't know what you mean."

"Can't you see for yourself?"

"I've no idea what it is."

Levitin leaned over the desk. Zyriansky gripped him by the shoulder and swung him round.

"So you want to read them once more, do you?"

"But I've got to read them if I'm to tell you whether it's really my work."

"Got to, you say! You had to write them too, I suppose."

"I didn't write them."

"You didn't?"

"No, I didn't."

Zyriansky looked at him with eyes like rapiers. Levitin dropped his with difficulty, his eyelashes trembling nervously. Zyriansky whispered a crushing remark and turned sharply to Torsky.

"Call a Council meeting, Vitya," he exclaimed.

"We're having one straightaway."

It took no longer than three minutes for Torsky to consult Zakharov. During that time complete silence reigned in the Commanders' Council room. Grinhaus looked out of the window. Zyriansky kept his eyes glued to the floor in an effort to keep his rage under restraint. Levitin stood up against the desk, looking rather pale as he stared into a corner of the room. When Zakharov came in his face was grave. He read the notes in silence and holding the last one in his hand scrutinized Levitin coldly and attentively.

"Very well," he said in the quietest of voices and went back to his office.

Levitin's pallor deepened.

"Begunok!" Torsky called towards the door.

"Yes, Comrade Commander!"

"Summon the Commanders' Council."

"Very good, Comrade Commander."

In the fifth detachment dormitory Wanda Stadnitskaya lay sobbing with her head buried in a pillow. Other girls were gathered around the table whispering among themselves in the depths of despair. Klava Kashirina came running into the room, almost unrecognizable.

"They're calling the Council. I'll choke him. With my own hands I will. Oh, if they don't kick him out... Come on, Wanda."

"I'm not going," Wanda said, raising her head from the pillow.

"What? Give in to Levitin! You wouldn't dare. What would Oksana say?"

Wanda sat up on the bed, dried her eyes quickly and looked towards Oksana.

"Oksana, tell me, do you think I ought to go?"

A sudden smile lit Oksana's face, the happy ingenuous smile of a girl without a care in the world.

“Come on, let’s go together. Why shouldn’t we? Let’s go and see what kind of a rat he is.”

Wanda’s eyebrows rose in surprise.

“Wash your face though,” one of the girls suggested. “Don’t let him see you’ve been crying.”

There was something decidedly unusual about the Council meeting that day. Torsky mercilessly ordered all the younger boys out of the room and they flocked in the corridor trying to discover what was happening in the Council from the faces of those who went in and out of the room. Begunok stood at the door letting nobody in except the commanders. As he let Wanda and Oksana pass the lads realized that he knew something. But when the door was shut fast and the boys asked Begunok what all the excitement was about, he answered seriously: “I can’t tell you.”

In a few minutes Torsky came out of the room and ordered Begunok to fetch Ryzhikov.

Begunok left Vanya Galchenko to guard the door and ran off in search of Ryzhikov. When the latter arrived he walked past the boys without as much as a glance at them.

Meanwhile the Council was seething with indignation. Many of its members could not keep to their seats and crowded round the chairman’s desk. There were no formal speeches as Torsky was letting the meeting take its own course: “I can’t stand it!” Zyriansky choked, clutching at his throat. “I can’t bear the sight of you. You’re still denying it. As if that matters a scrap! We’ll turn you out anyway, whether you own up or not.”

Levitin was not made to stand in the middle of the room, but stayed in the corner, and nobody insisted on him standing to attention. He was beginning to feel weak at the knees and held on to the back of the bench awkwardly with one hand. He kept his eyes glued on the wall beside him. Words failed Zyriansky but his eyes were charged with all the wrath he felt surging within him.

“How did you know? Who told you?” Volenko asked Levitin.

Levitin’s coarse lips moved but no sound emerged from them. Then he opened his mouth wide, gaped like a stranded fish and forced out hoarsely: “I don’t know anything about it. I didn’t—write—anything.”

Wanda was sitting between other two girls in the opposite corner of the room. A blush mantled her cheeks as she rose to speak.

“I’d like to say something, Vitya,” she exclaimed huskily.

Everyone looked at her and drew in closer together. She came forward towards the middle, keeping her eyes fixed on Levitin. She came and stood right in front of him with her hands behind her back. Levitin felt even more uncomfortable. He leaned heavily on the bench and turned still farther towards the wall.

“Listen to me, you!” Wanda said in a low voice, struggling to master her fury. “My past—what you wrote about me—all that—it was true. Let everybody know it, I don’t care. These are my comrades—all right, let them know it. But there’s something else.

Who drove me to that life? Do you know who? It was people like you, do you hear it? Yes, like you, like you....”

Wanda was throwing dazed glances around her as she finished. She was fighting hard against her tears. Then she rushed towards the door but Nesterenko’s strong arm barred her way, and no longer containing herself, she broke down and sobbed on his shoulder. No one was alarmed or surprised at this.

“Did you hear that, you scum?” Nesterenko asked Levitin in icy tones. “Wanda is right. You wrote that filth but now we respect her all the more. She’s our sister. Can a rat like you understand what that means? You’ll be kicked out, and you can be sure that half an hour after you’ve gone we’ll have forgotten your very name.”

“We’ll do it right away,” Zyriansky broke in. “Immediately after the meeting. I’ll put you on the road myself. We’ll have a few words in private.”

Lida Talikova, who was standing next to Zyriansky, spoke pensively as if to herself: “I’ve never voted this way before but I’m for expelling you. You crept into our lives.... You ought to be squashed ... like a slug.”

Zyriansky had had enough of debating. He went straight up to Levitin.

“That’s enough,” he exclaimed. “It’s ‘disgusting. So you didn’t write them! Come on, let’s hear you say so again!’”

Levitin said not a word. The room fell silent. Ilya Rudnev cast an appealing look at Zakharov. Something had to be done. Surprisingly, it was Ryzhikov’s voice that broke the silence.

“I’ve something to say, Torsky....”

“Ah yes! That’s why I sent for you.”

“What I have to say is of course Levitin ought to be expelled. Of course he wrote them. He has to spoil other people’s lives.”

Levitin swung round sharply in his corner.

“But it was you who told me.”

“Aah! So that’s it!” exclaimed someone, putting into words what could be read on every face.

Ryzhikov was not abashed. He was a man of the world and knew how to talk to people. The only thing that worried him somewhat was the expression on Igor Chernyavin’s face, but Chernyavin was a problem for later.

“I told you as between comrades,” Ryzhikov said with a virtuous smile. “I told you there was nothing bad in it, didn’t I?”

“Yes, that’s what you said.”

“Like a comrade, that’s how I told you—and you—you go and play a dirty trick like that! Why, I told you myself there wasn’t anything bad in it. Twice I did....”

Ryzhikov relaxed. Ryzhikov had honourably disclosed what he knew. But suddenly Igor’s contorted face was before him.

“Stop that!” Igor cried. “Do you remember what I said I’d do? Drown you! You haven’t forgotten that, have you?”

Ryzhikov drew back in alarm. Chernyavin came up to him. Someone took Chernyavin by the elbow but he impatiently shook himself free.

"This is a Council meeting not a trial," he went on. "But I won't forgive you this. No, never! I'll see you get what you deserve all right...."

Nodding his head to give his threat more emphasis, Igor left the room.

Ryzhikov searched everybody's face but found only hostility. He sat down.

"You've no business to sit here, get out!" said Torsky.

Ryzhikov hurried to the door. Wanda made way for him in disgust.

"Well, everything's clear now," Nesterenko drawled when the door had closed behind Ryzhikov.

"What are we going to do about this Levitin?" enquired Torsky.

Zyriansky cast a careless glance at Levitin.

"To hell with him," he said waving a hand. "There's no sense in going on talking about him. I suggest we punish him by knocking off his dinner tomorrow. It's enough to make him blub and beg for it but..."

There was laughter in the Council.

"It's wrong to ridicule a man like that," Zakharov protested seriously. "I protest most categorically. Expulsion is one thing. But this suggestion about knocking off his dinner won't do. Levitin too has his pride. Sometimes by punishing someone you show your respect for him."

Bratsan, the grim-faced commander of the third detachment, misunderstood Zakharov's meaning.

"Don't worry, Alexei Stepanovich," he said. "Nobody's going to deprive him of his dinner. You needn't be afraid of going hungry, Levitin. There's no point in kicking him out either, let him stay here and let him eat too, of course. But there's just one thing I'm going to ask for: Levitin, do me a favour, when the rest of us go to the Seventh of November demonstration don't join us, just stay at home. It'll be better for you and more—er—agreeable for us. You see—we shall be marching under our banner while you—well, what's the banner mean to you?"

Porshnev spoke next, kind and warm-hearted as ever.

"I'm on duty on the Seventh," he said. "I'll arrange something for him to do. Would you like to be kitchen monitor, Levitin?"

This last contemptuous blow drove Levitin to the bench. He huddled up in a corner and began to cry, quietly, oblivious to what was going on in the Council. For a second everybody looked at the shrinking figure.

"That's all," announced Torsky. "You may go. I declare the Commanders' Council closed."

Everyone moved towards the door, but suddenly Levitin sprang up and, all in tears, shrieked: "Comrades! Give me some sort of punishment! You can't leave it like this! Comrades! Alexei Stepanovich! You've got to punish me!"

Nobody paid the slightest attention to him. Then the youngsters poured into the room from the passage and formed a surprised ring round Levitin. He dropped back on the bench and sobbed with despair, muttering something.

“Off with you!” Zakharov called to the youngsters. “I’ve never seen such an inquisitive lot!”

They disappeared in a flash. Zakharov laid a hand on Levitin’s shoulder.

“Come on!” he said. “It’s no good taking on so. Come with me, I’ll prescribe a punishment for you.”

Levitin stopped sobbing and, sniffing a little, followed Zakharov to his office.

On the second day of the anniversary celebrations Zakharov was at work in the quietness of his office. Volodya Begunok and Vanya Galchenko came in and sat down quietly on the settee. Zakharov glanced at them, said nothing, and went on reckoning something up on a large sheet of foolscap.

“Bet you won’t tell him, . . .”

“Bet I will.”

“You won’t dare.”

“Who says so?”

“Why are you sitting here without a word, then?”

“What’s the hurry?”

“Oh, I know you, you’ll just sit and then go away.”

Vanya sprang to his feet and crossed to Zakharov’s desk. Zakharov took no notice of him. Vanya came nearer till his body was touching the desk. He laid his hands on the edge. Then he cast a sidelong look at Begunok and grew red in the face.

“Well?” enquired Zakharov, without looking up from his work.

“Alexei Stepanovich! Isn’t it the 8th today?”

“Yes, it is.”

“You know the new mould-boxes aren’t ready yet.”

“I know,” smiled Zakharov, looking at Vanya.

“So Alyosha Zyriansky was right?”

“It’s turned out so....”

Vanya felt like saying something more but could not contain himself and made a dash for the door-Begunok left the settee.

“That means Solomon Davidovich didn’t keep his word,” Vanya called from the door.

Zakharov nodded. The boys slammed the door behind them.

Zakharov’s official confirmation was necessary because of the extremely contradictory opinions held in the fourth detachment. There were fellows like Novak who maintained that the question of Blum’s promise was no longer on the agenda. This piece of opportunism arose from the fact that life in the factory had become very peaceful. As before, the lathes squeaked and broke down, the belts and pulleys went out of order

several times a day, but now the colonists were polite when they announced the mishaps to Blum and listened to his promises with patience. Blum, let it be said, made fewer promises.; more often he would throw his hands up and say mildly: "You understand 'how it is, dear comrades!"

Other signs of reconciliation between Blum and the colonists had been noticed. At the end of December the colony would be celebrating its birthday. With the anniversary of the Revolution behind them, the colonists now started to prepare for that occasion in earnest. Malenky, at a general meeting, recalled that by established tradition everything connected with the celebration had to be their own work. Now, without Blum's help they would not be able to observe this condition. A festival committee, with representatives of every detachment, was already at work. The eighth detachment sent Igor Chernyavin, the fourth Vanya Galchenko, the fifth Oksana: Vanya by this time was a member of the band; true, only of the beginners' group where he had been assigned the second cornet. As he had no hope of covering the whole practice course before the birthday celebration Vanya was able to devote a substantial part of his time to the preparations.

At its very first meeting the committee realized that it would be difficult to organize an amateur concert without Blum's help. So it was decided to approach him through a delegation of comrades who had some diplomatic experience. The general choice fell on Chernyavin and Shura Myatnikova who even in the library knew how to choose books to suit everyone's taste.

Igor opened the negotiations with Blum.

"We're arranging a concert..."

"I know, you want some scenery made," Blum cut him short. "You don't even need to ask me. I agree. Promise me not to spoil the planks and you can have as many as you like. When's the concert?"

"In six weeks time."

"Splendid, splendid. An excellent undertaking! I'd very much like to take part in it myself."

"Oh do, Solomon Davidovich! That's a fine idea."

"I'm quite a hand at reciting, you know, and I can dance too. You ought to see me in a hopak. That's something, I can assure you," he chortled. "I can still teach you young people a thing or two, drat it!"

"Perhaps you'll dance with Oksana?"

"Why not? Do you think I'd be afraid to?"

"Let's shake on it then."

"All right, shake!"

Blum laughed waggishly and Igor ran off to tell the good news to the committee. Malenky was delighted with the results of his mission.

"It'll be something original to have Solomon Davidovich performing," he said. "Moreover, we'll get the planks, and some plywood as well as cloth and paper and fairy lamps and other kinds of stage effects."

A week later, Igor laid before the committee a more detailed plan for Blum's participation. It was greeted with shrieks of laughter. Malenky listened to it with sparkling eyes.

"Stupendous!" he exclaimed. "But won't he smell a rat?"

"Not on your life."

"It's blue murder!" said Vanya.

Oksana was troubled by the daring plan.

"I don't think you ought to do it, Igor," she advised.

"But it will be marvellous, Oksana! Absolutely marvellous! Solomon Davidovich won't mind at all. He'll like it."

"Of course he'll like it. It's stupendous!" Malenky repeated.

Vanya tagged on to Igor when he approached Blum again.

"Be careful," Igor warned Vanya. "Don't let your eyes give you away. Hide them somehow."

Vanya solved this problem. The only way he could think of—by holding the palm of his hand in front of his eyes while Igor talked.

Blum was overjoyed at Igor's suggestion.

"Boris Godunov's monologue?"

"Yes, Pushkin's."

"What's that? Which one do you mean, Boris Godunov's or Pushkin's? Let's get this straight."

"'Boris Godunov' by Pushkin."

"Well, that ought to be explained to avoid any misunderstanding. I'll announce it myself—'Boris Godunov' by Pushkin."

"You needn't worry about that. The announcer will do it."

"All the better. Let's see, Boris Godunov was a general, wasn't he?"

"He was a tsar."

"All right, a tsar, or rather a former tsar. I seem to remember something about him. Wasn't he stabbed by somebody?"

"No, he was the one who did the stabbing. Prince Dimitri, you remember."

"Yes, of course. There was some unpleasantness or other.... Right, I'll recite that."

"And we want the hopak too."

"With Oksana?"

"Yes."

"H'm ... we'll have to rehearse. I really haven't time for that."

"There's no need for rehearsal, Solomon Davidovich. You see, we want it to be a surprise to—er—everybody. ... We'll run through it on the quiet."

"You can count on me for that!"

“Well, here it is.”

“What have you got there?”

“This is the text.”

“Ah, the text. How neatly you’ve written it out! Who wrote all that so nicely?”

“That’s Vanya Galchenko’s work.”

“So you did it, Vanya? What are you grinning for? I didn’t know you had such a happy nature.”

“Oh, he’s always like that, Solomon Davidovich,” said Igor hastily, pinching Vanya’s leg. Vanya lost no time in changing his nature.

“Don’t worry,” Blum assured them as they left. “I shan’t let you down. You think you’ve always got to go begging things from me: ‘give us raw materials, Solomon Davidovich, give us lathes, give us mould-boxes, give us this and that.’ Well, you’re going to see another side of me now.”

The preparations for the festivities went ahead at full speed. But other things were on the move too. One free day the foundation stone of the new factory was laid. The digging of foundation pits had been going on for several days on the edge of the playground opposite the flower-beds. Bricks kept arriving in collective-farm carts and were stacked in neat rows. Kreutzer and many other people, including engineer Vorgunov, came to watch the foundation stone ‘being laid. Kreutzer showed everybody round the colony. Vorgunov, however, refused to look at anything. He went and sat in Zakharov’s office.

“This foundation laying doesn’t mean a thing. It’s just a bit of show—a pick-me-up. Our folk always need that, you know.”

“What exactly do you mean by ‘our folk,’ Pyotr Petrovich?”

“I mean we Russians.”

“Don’t you like the Russians?”

“I may like *borshch* with garlic, but the thing is that I want the Russians to work properly.”

“That’s fine then, we shall be able to work together.”

“That remains to be seen. But, tell me, Comrade Zakharov, do you really think that your—er—young people are capable of running this factory?”

“I really do.”

“I see.... Well, it’s time to attend the celebrations. ...”

Spick and span in their parade uniforms, the colonists were lined up on the playground. The colours were carried out with the usual solemnity. Vorgunov stood beside the foundation pits smiling.

“So you like it after all, don’t you?” Kreutzer asked him.

“Oh, I like it. That’s just the thing for them. Music, parading—lovely! But what’s it all got to do with starting an electric tool factory? You can’t mix things up like that.”

“We’ll mix ‘em, Pyotr Petrovich. We’ll mix the music with the factory and we’ll add a full portion of you too!”

“Oh no, you leave me out,” Vorgunov said with a pout; “I’m too old for fun and games, Mikhail Osipovich!”

On the bed of bricks in the bottom of the main pit there was deposited a large sheet of paper stating when and by whom the foundations of the factory were laid. A brick was placed on top of it and cemented down by Kreutzer and Vanya Galchenko, the oldest and the youngest representatives of the Soviet power in the colony.

Vanya was on sentry duty from ten o’clock till midnight that evening. He took up his post as the “bedtime” signal was being blown. Half an hour later, all was quiet on the stairs. Vanya switched out the passage lights, drew his overcoat belt in tight and began to pace up -and down the vestibule with long strides. From time to time he shifted the rifle from hand to hand. At half past eleven Zakharov laid his work aside.

“Not feeling sleepy?” he asked Vanya as he passed by.

“I feel like staying here till morning,” Vanya replied.

“That’s a good chap! Good night! Who takes over from you?”

“Volodya Begunok.”

“Who’s signaller tomorrow morning then?” “Petka’s doing it.” “Good....”

Zakharov went on his way. When only ten minutes-of the watch remained, the door opened quietly and in popped a ginger-haired head with green eyes that watched Vanya with suspicion.

“I — er — I’ve been in town. Been having a bit of a good time.”

Hanging on to the door Ryzhikov barged into the vestibule and staggered up to Vanya.

“Make a note of it — in your report,” he hiccupped, with a feeble gesture. “I don’t care! It’s all the same to me. Go on, put it down: Ryzhikov — three hours late. Late, who the hell cares about that?”

He crept up the staircase, literally crept because he kept stumbling and groping at the stairs with his hands. Vanya watched him with eyes full of alarm.

When Begunok ran down in Ms tightly-belted overcoat Vanya whispered vehemently: “Ryzhikov came home drunk!” “Ryzhikov! Drunk, you say?”

“Blind drunk, wobbling about and falling down all -the time.”

“He’ll get it! Now they really will ‘kick him out. . . .’”

“But what if he asks who saw him?” “You’ll have to report it to the commander on duty tomorrow,”

“But suppose he says I’m lying.”

“There’s no arguing with the report, you know.”

There was a fall of snow at the end of November, an event which the small fry greeted with prolonged cries of joy and waving of hands. There were snowball fights in the park and work was started on building a snow castle, but as it turned out there was little enough material for this: it was an early thin fall, not at all what was wanted for building a castle. So the lads turned their attention to the pond: it ought to freeze and then the colony would have its skating-rink. Misha Gontar became a person of great importance to the little fellows in those days for he excelled in making skate fittings. The other locksmiths also knew how to make them but they were swamped with orders from other detachments and Gontar as 5th form monitor specialized in serving the fourth detachment. Skates were shared out three pairs per detachment; the fourth, however, was in luck as they got all those pairs which were too small for other detachments, where feet tended, to be large. Besides this public property, there were private skates belonging to some of the older colonists. Filka Shary even had two pairs. Zyriansky once proposed to turn all skates over to the detachments, reasoning that boys' feet grow fast and that last year's skates are no use anyway. As it turned out, the fourth detachment received about ten pairs, which was more than enough to meet their requirements. The pond, unfortunately, failed to freeze. Its banks were snow-clad but the surface would not congeal and went on reflecting the sky and the clouds, just like in summer-time. According to the experts the water ought to thicken with sludge, before it froze, but hard as they looked the boys could find no "fat."

In the colony it seemed to be evening all day long. They got up, had their breakfast and began work under electric light; and the lights had to be switched on again soon after dinner. Waking up in the morning became more difficult and the practice of staying in bed till five minutes before inspection became more wide-spread. It was specially hard for those older boys who also had to shave before breakfast. Smooth-cheeked and smelling of eau-de Cologne they straggled into the dining-hall wearing guilty expressions and trying to avoid the look of the commander on duty. As they were all seniors the latter would limit himself to a frown. Of course when Zyriansky was on duty the boys would shave before inspection, but that only happened twice a month so that it looked as if life was going to be bearable on the whole. These conditions came to a sudden end during Rudnev's spell of duty. Never changing his customary pleasant and attentive manner, Rudnev launched an attack that amounted to a demonstration by ordering the Sanitary Commission monitor to report the names of all those who had failed to shave. This highly novel measure made a profound impression, and no sooner was inspection over than a lot of boys were to be seen running down the passages with shaving-sets in their hands.

From the day he received the title of colonist, Igor Chernyavin also considered it essential to remove his beard and moustache. Very possibly this decision might have been deferred but, in the first place there was something respectable about a razor, secondly, it was somewhat unseemly to flaunt one's whiskers in a colony for children, and thirdly those whiskers were reddish and after Igor's first shave acquired a most uninviting look. Alarmed by Rudnev's behaviour, Igor grabbed his razor, towel and soap-box and dashed to the bath-room. Downstairs the breakfast signal was sounded. In the bath-rooms and dormitories of "B" Wing could be heard the scrape of razors; young blood flowed freely—the price of inexperience and speed. Rudnev was the youngest of the commanders and till now to be late for breakfast when he was on duty, even by a quarter of an hour, had not been considered a dangerous venture. But on this day he had

shown sharp teeth during the inspection and it was difficult to foresee what his mood would be during breakfast. The consoling thought was that the fellow would not dare to leave some thirty senior colonists without their breakfasts. What happened turned out to be at once sadder and more artful. Rudnev, it is true, did not dare to launch a frontal attack but instead had a few words in Zakharov's office. As a result Zakharov took it into his head to take a look at the poster-plan for the first quarter, which hung in the vestibule at the very entrance to the dining-hall. He started examining it just five minutes after the breakfast signal had been given. He stood in front of the poster, his hand clasped behind his back and concentrated on figures which even the youngsters in the fourth detachment had long ago learnt off by heart. Ten minutes later the staircase resounded under the feet of the veterans who had by then succeeded not only in removing their whiskers but also all traces of blood from their faces.. They did not permit themselves a second's confusion or hesitation. Deft legs bore them not into the dining-hall but towards the main entrance; deft arms swung to the salute:

"Good morning, Alexei Stepanovich!"

"Good morning, Alexei Stepanovich!"

"Good morning, Alexei Stepanovich!"

Zakharov was obliged to turn away from the poster to reply to the greetings. Igor Chernyavin noticed from the upper landing how the stream of colonists flowed out through the main entrance and when his turn came to pass Zakharov and salute him not a single-muscle drew him towards the dining-hall. It was clear that there was only one way out—through the door and into the work-shops. In the yard he flew into the merry company of his comrades who could at least enjoy the pleasure of meeting the last of the latecomers, watching the complicated play of emotions on their faces and laughing with them. Then Zakharov came out on to the porch.

"It looks as if it's going to be fine today—warm ..." he said. "How did you get that cut, Misha?"

Gontar shot a glance at the others and replied with dignity: "I needed a shave, Alexei Stepanovich."

"You should get a safety razor. They're handier and quicker."

By now, colonists who had finished their breakfast were coming on the porch, Nesterenko among them.

"Misha, why on earth didn't you go in..." he began, not noticing Zakharov. "Oh, good morning, Alexei Stepanovich! Why didn't you—er—wait for me, Misha?"

This seemed to be a question Gontar couldn't answer so quickly. Zakharov adjusted his pince-nez and went indoors.

Igor Chernyavin was also in the group of colonists standing in the yard. He felt sorry for Nesterenko who had all but given the game away with his question. Nesterenko, however, had already grasped the situation.

"My word!" he exclaimed. "You wait until I'm on duty and then you'll see something, my lordlings!"

When Rudnev appeared on the porch his expression gave not the slightest hint that he had had anything to do with the affair.

“Why did you miss breakfast?” he asked in surprise.

After that even the most respected veterans hurried in to breakfast with the others. They found their eyes drawn involuntarily to the poster-plan as they passed it in the vestibule.

On it they read the following figures:

PLAN FOR FIRST QUARTER Metal-Workers Oil-cans 235,000

Carpenters

Lecture-hall desks Drawing desks . Chairs Designers' spools

235,000 roubles

1,400

1,250

1,450

1,450

180,000 roubles

Ores s m a kin g- S hop Shorts 25,000

Bloomers 8,870

Komsomol tunics 3,350

Sports shirts 4,700

70,000 roubles

Total 485,000 roubles

The plan set a very difficult task. “There’s a plan for you!” the colonists said with relish.

The old hands alone knew that the days of rejoicing were numbered, and that after the 1st of January times would be hard. But the fourth detachment was quite sure that life was going to be interesting even after New Year’s Day. There were evening meetings of the Komsomol organization where Blum was the target of various questions. But Blum was no longer having a hot time and he tried to explain in detail how the plan could be fulfilled. This was the era of good relations.

“Your request has been fulfilled, Comrade Colonists,” Blum told a general meeting. “Today the new mould-boxes are ready.”

“What’s the date?” a single voice was heard asking-

“The 3rd of December,” other voices readily replied.

“What’s that got to do with it?” retorted Blum. “The main thing is that you’ve got the mould-boxes. All the rest is a mere formality.”

The colonists laughed and applauded loudly. Many of those who laughed were careful to conceal themselves behind the backs of others. The fourth •detachment looked apprehensively at Zyriansky. Would he raise the question of the sacredness of the

pledged word? But Zyriansky was also laughing and applauding. Blum was deeply moved by the ovation.

“You see,” he boomed, raising his arm above his head. “I always do what I can for the factory.”

Another burst of applause followed these words. Now the laughter came free and strong. Zakharov laughed. Blum himself laughed. Even Ryzhikov laughed and applauded. Ryzhikov was glad that everything had ended peacefully, the more so because he was a moulder and thus had a keen interest in the boxes. True, he had ‘known many unpleasant moments in the past month—after the Levitin affair even Ruslan Gorokhov had growled in his face: “Look here, keep away from me, will you? I can get on without your ‘company.’”

Then there had been that occasion when he stood blinking before the Commanders’ Council after sentry Galchenko’s report. But he’d got through that too, only he had not liked that the commanders seemed to be reluctant to talk about him. Zyriansky appeared to be speaking for them all when he said: “Ryzhikov’s a shady customer, there’s something rotten about him. But let’s wait. Didn’t we make real people out of still worse muck? We have that factory ahead of us, 300,000 to raise, a great life to be won and off he goes to town drinking and comes home to the colony drunk. What sort of fellow can you call him after that? He knows how to talk, of course. But you can teach a parrot to do that! Parrots, however, don’t get drunk. We’ll just have to wait and see. Only—Ryzhikov, you look out: there’ll come a time when you’ll be counting your unbroken bones!”

Ryzhikov squirmed in the middle of the room, laid a hand on his heart, pleaded guilty and promised to be good as he tried to make a serious and convincing face. And, as usual, Volenko spoke up for him.

““We ought to realize that Ryzhikov has grown used to living that way,” Volenko pleaded. “He can’t make a sudden break with his past. We must wait, comrades. There’s no sense in punishing him. He doesn’t understand anything about punishment yet. But you’ll see you’ll see!”

“The Commanders’ Council did not take any decision, merely dismissing Ryzhikov with the words: “We shall see.”

After that occurrence Ryzhikov went about dragging his feet, talking to nobody but working “like a wolf” in the foundry. Blum was lavish with his praise.

“If everybody worked like Ryzhikov,” he would say, “it wouldn’t be a question of ‘having 300,000 in the bank, we’d have at least half a million. Hands of gold, he’s got!”

The birthday celebrations went off splendidly. There were a lot of guests, a wonderful supper was served, and the atmosphere in the colony was warm, friendly and merry. Under Danilo Gorovoy’s supervision a chain of bonfires was laid all the way along the road through the woods right up to the tram terminus. Between the fires a stream of guests flowed to the colony in cars or on foot. They were met at the main door by monitors, handed tickets for the concert and invited to table by the various detachments.

The colonists showed the guests over their dormitories, club-rooms, school classrooms, they pointed out and explained the poster-plan for the first quarter; they did not, however, take them into the work-shops. But the hit of the evening was the elaborate and high-spirited concert. There were songs and recitations and acrobatic turns. The youngsters put on a sketch which they called "A tour of Europe with the First of May colonists." Vanya Galchenko played a part in this but the main role was Filka Shary's. Shary impersonated Ramsay MacDonald. This sketch was extremely interesting. To the accompaniment of general applause the boys formed single-file, the lights went out and each actor switched on a pocket-torch. The orchestra struck up a march called "The Train." To its strains the colonists set off on their travels. On their way they had interesting meetings with Marshal Pilsudski, Mussolini, Ramsay MacDonald and other "personalities," each of whom boasted of his achievements. But the colonists were not easily taken in; they very well knew how to scrutinize the affairs of Western Europe.

Blum's appearance created a deep impression. When he stepped on to the stage, wearing a new brown suit, Sancho Zorin announced:

"Solomon Davidovich will read excerpts from 'Boris Godunov' by Pushkin, adapted by Igor Chernyavin."

"What do I hear?" Kreutzer, sitting in the front row, whispered in Zakharov's ear. "Pushkin adapted by Chernyavin?"

"It's a leg-pull, of course."

Blum gathered his brows in a frown and began in an expressive voice:

The highest power I have attained.

Six months my rule has been in peace.

"The little wretches!" Kreutzer muttered.

Yet happiness escapes me. I had thought to calm my subjects as they toiled In work-shops at the factory.

A lot of colonists rose from their seats. Their faces expressed unconcealed, though as yet mute, delight.

The school-teacher Nadezhda Vasilyevna who sat beside Zakharov smiled dreamily. Zakharov dropped his eyelids and listened attentively. Kreutzer's eyes lit up as he craned his neck to catch sight of everything that was happening on the stage. With an intensely tragic expression Blum roared on:

I brought them Lathes, I found them work.

Yet they in ceaseless rage condemn me!

This was too much for the colonists. Few of them remained in their seats as they hailed the reciter with deafening applause, their faces reflecting feelings of the purest aesthetic delight.

Blum could not restrain a smile and this but fanned the audience's delight. There was real feeling in his voice when he continued. The hall grew silent again in expectation of joys to come.

Who ever dies, I am the secret murderer.

*At my door lies the death of the transmission,
I ruined the lungs of humble foundry-folk!*

What came next was drowned in the mounting wave of applause, of shouts, of wild laughter. Kreutzer laughed louder than any, though he said to Zakharov: "Those editors ought to get it hot, you know. I don't know how they dare!"

Blum, his flushed face and bald head emitting a merry shine, stretched one arm towards the hall.

"Let me finish!" he cried.

The colonists bit their lips. Blum took a pace forward, laid his hand on his heart and turned his eyes upwards.

*Around my head all turns, all things are loathsome.
And cheeky urchins dance before my eyes.
Away, away, but where to run? Oh horror!
Ah, wretched is the one whose purse is empty!*

He finished and modestly lowered his eyes. But for all its artistic perfection he could not maintain this restrained pose for long. In response to the uproarious glee of the public Slum's face also lit up with smiles. Drawing himself proudly erect he flung one hand high into the air and only then began to bow as the audience continued to shout and applaud. At last the curtain fell.

During the interval Blum came to the first row. He proudly responded to the colonists' greetings. As he shook hands with Kreutzer his face wore a condescending smile.

"Well, what do you think of that for an ovation?" he asked.

"Look here, Solomon Davidovich! Those scamps were pulling, your leg."

"What do you mean?"

"They changed the words in the monologue."

"Changed the words! Impossible. Why, look, I've got them here..."

"Let me see! Ah, the little wretches! Look, your Boris Godunov speaks only about the factory affairs of the First of May Colony."

"You don't say?"

"Listen to this: 'I brought them lathes,' or 'I ruined the lungs of humble foundry-folk.' That means you, Solomon Davidovich, not Boris Godunov! And those young imps..."

"You mean that's not what Pushkin wrote?" "I think not. Pushkin wrote 'blood-stained children' and here I read 'cheeky urchins.'"

"But, you know, they really are cheeky. And what did Pushkin write about the foundry?"

"About your foundry? What's that to Pushkin? He's been dead a hundred years." Blum was truly indignant.

"Ah, what impudence! I'll go and have it out with them straightaway! I'll give them a piece of my mind!"

He rushed behind stage. Someone tried to head him off but he managed to catch Igor Chernyavin, the editor-in-chief.

“You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Comrade Chernyavin!” “What for?”

“That wasn’t at all the way Pushkin wrote.” “As if that matters? Haven’t you heard what Meyerhold does?”

“What Meyerhold?” “The one in Moscow.” “Has he got a factory too?”

“I should say he has! We did leave a bit of Pushkin in, but he doesn’t leave in any at all. That’s the fashion now!”

“Well, of course, if it’s the fashion that’s all right, but how do the foundry-workers come into the picture?”

“Why shouldn’t they? Do you think there weren’t any foundry-workers in Boris Godunov’s time? Who do you think made the guns?”

“Perhaps they made the guns but d’you think they had smoke like in our place?”

“Of course they had! What could they know about ventilation?”

“H’m, that’s true.”

“Your turn went splendidly, Solomon Davidovich. You saw how everybody liked it. You’ll have to dance in a few minutes.”

“I’m afraid to after what’s happened. It’s supposed to be a hopak but what if it turns out to be a la Meyerhold, too?”

“It’s a hopak, word of honour it is!”

“Well, damn it, I’ll dance a hopak!” Blum laughed and shook his fist.

Blum returned to the hall.

“I gave it them hot,” he ‘mollified Kreutzer, “but they told me everybody’s doing that sort of thing now. There’s somebody called Meyerhold in Moscow who does it too. Seems to be the fashion.”

Kreutzer gave Blum a hug and made him sit beside him.

“That’s true enough,” he said. “But you were fine!”

Quarter of an hour later Blum, dressed in Ukrainian Cossack costume with baggy trousers and a grey sheepskin hat, performed the squatting steps of the hopak. Slim, light-footed Oksana only just managed to avoid his ‘iron-shod jack-boots. There was no mischief in the way the colonists applauded this time for Blum was undoubtedly a tiptop dancer. There was humour and love of life galore in his masterly adroitness and bold sweeping bounds. After the dance was over the doctor leapt on to the stage and declared loudly: “Did you see that? He’d ‘better not come to me .about his heart after that!”

“He won’t see the difference,” Blum said with a sad smile. “The Zaporozhye Cossacks could go on dancing the ‘hopak till their death, and it never did their hearts any harm. But you put them in charge of factories and you’d soon find yourself with plenty of patients!”

On the day after the concert Igor Chernyavin ran down to the cloak-room for his overcoat. But his peg was bare.

"Misha," he said to Gontar who was putting on his coat near-by, "my coat's gone."

"What do you mean 'gone'?"

"Look, the peg's empty."

"Somebody's taken it by mistake, I suppose. Go and look around for it,"

During the lunch break Igor went through all the coats. Each one had a number stitched on the inside of the collar but Igor did not find his number among them. He told commander on duty Bratsan about it. .

"Do you think somebody's pinched it then?" Bratsan asked him in a vexed manner.

"I've searched the whole cloak-room for it."

"Better have another look. Where on earth could it have got to?"

Bratsan went away looking peeved. But it was he who approached Igor after work and asked him gloomily: "Any signs of that coat?"

"No."

"That fellow Novak in the fourth detachment — his has gone too."

"Stolen?"

Bratsan did not reply. Clearly he didn't like the word.

Igor attended the commanders' report that evening.

"Comrade Director!" Bratsan reported. "Two over-coats were stolen from the cloak-room last night— Chernyavin's and Novak's."

Zakharov, calm as usual, raised an arm and answered "Very good." And all the others present gave the usual salute to the commander on duty's report. Yet, somehow, the atmosphere at that evening's proceedings was different. Faces lacked their usual cheerfulness. The boys felt that the last report would not be followed by the setting in of the informal friendly atmosphere, that the colony would not be its usual self that night, that there would be no smiles and no jokes. And it did: happen that when he had taken the last report, Zakharov quickly resumed his place at the desk, took some papers from his files, propped his head on his hand and began to read as attentively as if no one else were in the office. . In fact, there were some thirty colonists standing there in silence and looking at him.

"Whom do you suspect?" Nesterenko asked Bratsan in a whisper.

Everybody heard the question. All knew, however, that the coats had disappeared without a trace of the culprit. But, being on duty, Bratsan was obliged 'to take responsibility for his day and that meant finding some answer to Nesterenko's question. Bratsan knew that.

"During the night watches there were four sentries on duty, all of them colonists," he said in a loud voice. "They are above suspicion, of course. They are Loboiko.

Grachov, Solovyov and Tolenko—all from my detachment. I vouch for all of them. They wouldn't leave their posts or fall asleep at them. On the other hand, you can't get

out of the cloak-room without passing the sentry. That means the coats were stolen through the window that is through the air-vent, for the main windows are sealed. Well, it's very difficult to get a coat through the vent. It's a very small one; I tried this afternoon. The job's been done by an experienced thief."

"Did anything happen during the night?" Zakharov enquired without looking up from his papers.

"I checked that. Everything was normal. The sentries reported that nobody left the building during the night. Zyriansky was the last to come in, at eleven o'clock. You gave him permission to go to town on business. What I feel is that if it were a question of just one coat being missing—well—you'd have said it had been forgotten somewhere. But there are two, in different detachments. Chernyavin and Novak scarcely know each other."

"Call a closed Council meeting immediately in this room, Torsky," snapped Zakharov. "Very good, Comrade Director." Only commanders stayed in the office. When the last of the colonists left, Zakharov leant back in his chair.

"All right. Now tell me what you think about it." "It's very hard to say," Torsky began from his place among the others on the settee. "It's dangerous to suspect anyone without any grounds. I made a list today of those we can't yet vouch for. Well, it comes to nineteen people. There's no point in announcing their names. A couple of overcoats aren't worth that. For the sake of one thief you may offend eighteen fellows for the rest of their lives. That's the trouble—we can't put a single question to anyone. We can't even ask anybody whether they had to get up in the night for some other reason...."

"No, you can't start questioning anybody," Zakharov confirmed in a dissatisfied voice.

"That's what I say, you can't."

"I'd like to say this," said Zyriansky from the edge of the settee. "I see it this way. First: the coat wasn't pinched during the night but in the morning when everyone was putting his overcoat on. It was done by someone who had the nerve to take somebody else's coat and put it on himself. In front of everybody. Maybe Chernyavin himself met him when he went into the cloak-room. If someone had noticed him he could have got out of it easily enough by saying he'd taken it by mistake, you see."

"But there were two coats stolen."

"Yes, I know. But Novak's coat was hanging there for three days. Novak didn't wear it. He ran to the shop without it, like lots of my kids do. That means Novak's coat may have been taken the day before yesterday without anyone noticing it."

"You're partly right," began Nesterenko, but Zyriansky turned on him sharply and went on: "Wait, I haven't finished. Secondly: that coat is still in the colony, hidden in someone's quarters or in the village, only I don't think it's in the village but with one of the staff here or, perhaps, with some accomplice pretending to be a building worker. I can't see any other way. You can't take an overcoat into town, you'd be spotted, and it would take time, anyway. No chance of doing it on a working day and on holidays there are too many of our chaps on the road to town. Both the coats are still here, somewhere on the grounds."

All were silent. Zyriansky was probably quite right. Nesterenko was the only one to cast some slight doubt.

"You're partly right, Alexei, but Chernyavin's coat hung on the right while Novak's was at the other side of the room. You're suggesting the thief put the coat on and went out. Possibly he did. Just put it on and went out and then came in again not wearing a coat. There are so many running about without coats, it wouldn't be noticed. But what about the sizes? It's one thing to put on Chernyavin's coat, but quite another to wear Novak's. It looks as if there were a pair of 'em at it."

"That couldn't be so," said Volenko quietly.

"Why not?"

"We don't have partnerships like that here. You can find an individual to suspect but a pair of 'em, working together, no. We just don't have "em."

"Volenko's right," Torsky concurred. "There's only one. But the devil knows how he got away with it. It must have been more or less the way Zyriansky said. What's your opinion about that Ryzhikov of yours, Volenko?"

It was the first name that had been -mentioned. The commanders' faces grew sharp with attention.

"There are other fellows you could suspect in my detachment," Volenko began, after a moment's thought. "There's Gorokhov, for example, or Levitin. But Levitin's been busy with something else lately. Alexei Stepanovich gave him a punishment task for those notes, you remember, he's got to sweep the garden paths for a month. He's putting a lot into the work because -he wants to be forgiven. Working fine. He wouldn't go in for thieving now. As for Gorokhov he seems to be thinking more about his dove-tailing machine than anything else, and now the new plan's been put up he's got nothing in his head but 'tenon this way, tenon that way,' besides which he's working on some invention or other so that he can put more ends into his machine at the same time. Do you think a fellow would steal when he's in that state? I don't."

"No, it wasn't Gorokhov," said Torsky bluntly.

"Well then, take Ryzhikov," Volenko continued. "I grant you, Ryzhikov's got no more conscience than a sparrow has. But Ryzhikov doesn't need to steal. He's now earning more than anybody else in the colony. Last pay day he drew seventy roubles in cash. Put fifty in the savings bank and gave me his savings book so as not to spend it. The only thing he thinks about is how to earn more money. . . . Why should he go in for stealing? And besides, he's still new here, nobody knows him and he couldn't have got away with it without an accomplice."

"Don't you worry about that," said Bratsan. "You don't know how to manage it, but Ryzhikov knows all about that."

"No, it's too soon for him to have found a way," drawled Nesterenko.

"Well, that deals with the first detachment," Torsky said. "What about yours, Levka?"

The commander of the second detachment, Porshnev, was a happy fellow, the happiest, perhaps, of all in the colony. He was always even-tempered, pleased with life, he'd never been known to "get H hot" and when-

•ever he took up anything the matter seemed to catch his mood and go ahead with a swing. So now all he did was to shrug his shoulders and say: "How could it have been one of my fellows? I can trust the lot of 'em."

"You vouch for them all?"

"Why should I have to vouch for them? They can all vouch for each other, you know that."

Everybody in the colony had a soft spot in his heart for Porshnev. It made one feel good to look at him and watch the lazy wave of joy which always surged

-in his unhurried gaze, in the slow movement of his dark brows, in the smiling line of his full finely flexed lips. And looking at Porshnev one remembered the second detachment, seventeen boys who might have been specially put together into one detachment. They were all sixteen years old, all the same height, all more or less good-looking, air hard and keen workers. Most of the second detachment worked in the machine-shop on jointing-machines of various makes. They were talkative and eager in their style of work and at the same time they worked with real efficiency.

"No," said Nesterenko. "It can't be anyone from the second detachment."

The rest of the detachments had their candidates but this one was a bookworm, that one had given himself up to cornet-playing, a 'third was in the model-makers' circle, a fourth had become a close friend of Malenky.

a fifth W's chummy with the doctor, a sixth was getting top marks in geography. The fifth and eleventh detachments did not even allow their members to be mentioned in connection with such a shabby business.

And finally, when the investigation of the last detachment, the tenth, had concluded—it was a matter of a very short time because Rudnev would not agree¹ to anyone in it being placed under 'Suspicion except himself and his deputy—the Council recovered its friendly happy atmosphere.

"Drat it all," exclaimed Zakharov. "What wonderful folk we've got here! It's simply remarkable."

The commanders' hearts grew light, they laughed, drew in closer to each other on the settee as if ready to sit there till morning.

"We have wonderful people here, Alexei Stepanovich," said Nesterenko, rubbing his hands with pleasure.

Zakharov stood up at his desk, tossed a scrap of paper on the window-sill, pressed his hands together and began to speak thoughtfully.

"It comes to this then. We've got one dud among us. Just one," he said. "I don't think there's any need to search for him. Two coats is a trifle. We'll see what happens next. Possibly it's his last robbery. Please don't talk about the affair in your detachments. Just act as if there hadn't been any theft. Agreed?"

"Agreed, Alexei Stepanovich."

"It's simply someone who's still got the habit," said Zakharov condescendingly. "Vitya, please arrange for Chernyavin and Novak to be given new overcoats tomorrow."

Nobody had gone to sleep in the detachments. Everyone was waiting for the commanders to return. Volenko entered the dormitory looking serious.

“Well, what happened, were they found?” asked Sadovnichy.

“We—er—were talking about other things most of the time.”

“So they’ve not been found?”

“What do you think? Some fellow on his own....”

“Just one—damn his soul. Ooh, if I could get hold of him!”

Ryzhikov stood in the middle of the dormitory, hands in pockets, a happy smile on his face.

“All those wages are to blame for it,” he said.

“Why’s that?” Sadovnichy enquired with interest.

“Well, I earn a lot and it makes others envious.”

Ruslan Gorokhov fixed his eyes on Ryzhikov.

“And who do you think envies you?” he asked.

“Why, there are some who don’t earn enough even to pay for their food, such as Gorlenko, Tolenko, Vasilyev and all those Galchenkos and Begunoks....”

“Do you suspect Begunok?” asked Gorokhov, screwing up his eyes.

Ryzhikov did not care for such a direct question.

“Oh no, I don’t,” he said.

He strolled off to his bed. Gorokhov swung round slowly, following him with his eyes.

“What are you staring at me for?” Ryzhikov suddenly snapped at him.

“I like you—very much!” mumbled Gorokhov. “You’re a .fine fellow, you are!”

Volenko dropped his eyes, looked up again, watched Ryzhikov carefully, then Gorokhov. A disturbing thought made his lips twitch a little.

31

“Dyubek”

There were impressionable and inflexible spirits in the fourth detachment which could not permit the theft of the two overcoats to go unavenged.

Nobody in the colony knew what meetings were held in the heart of the fourth detachment, nobody noticed its operations except — Zakharov. Perhaps the commanders on duty too caught an inkling of these activities but strictly in the line of duty, with their official eye, so to speak. Till now the members of this glorious “invincible” detachment boasted of two special traits. On the one hand their voices were remarkable for their propensity for the fortissimo. Even their most secret conversations were usually held in such a deafening uproar that it was difficult to understand what anyone was talking about. Their eyes might wear the most conspiratorial expressions but nothing could get them to hold their jaws. When older people need to call for somebody they usually look round

first to see if the person they want is near-by. These youngsters, however, were against wasting their precious eyesight and no less precious time this way, especially as they always had at their disposal that loud and universal instrument, the human voice. And so they resorted to a very simple expedient: they just came out on the landing or on the central walk in the park and bawled like hell, screwing up their eyes and even squatting a little from the effort involved. You would hear: “Volodya-a-!!”

Then the fellow would listen for a moment and, if he got no reply, shout again even more revoltingly: “Volo-o-odya!”

In the near surroundings, the shout would be heard quite distinctly and everybody would know that one of the colony’s Volodyas was wanted. But the shouting had no practical value at that close range, for this particular Volodya would be a long way off, at -a distance where the call would reach the ear in the vaguest of forms, simply as:

“O-o-a-a!”

Yet these sketchy sounds would always prove highly effective. Although there were at least a dozen Volodyas in the colony, only that very one who was wanted would recognize his name. The rest of them who happened to be about at that particular moment would merely frown. This was a means of communication strongly disapproved of by the commanders on duty, especially when employed in passages or on the landings.

That was one feature of the fourth detachment. The other was a slight tendency to separatism among its youngest members. Commanders on duty had good reason for misgivings about this trait. Excess separatism always threatened to end in a broken greenhouse window, a torn suit or some other bit of mischief. The commanders knew very well that these separate actions were called forth by innocent enough reasons—an ant-hill, a nightingale’s nest, some old wheel thrown out in the backyard by a drayman, the unexpected discovery of a pile of old tins. Such things stirred the boys to furious activity, shouts would arise from all parts of the yard, scores of feet would dash about like the wind. Eyes gleaming with excitement, ears pricked up alertly, mouths agape, lightning movements, squeals of protest and roars of triumph coming from somewhere out of sight—what commander on duty could not but be filled with alarm by all this? No one in the colony had forgotten how at the beginning of the previous spring the commander of the seventh detachment, Vasya Klyushnev was given five hours detention for being inattentive on duty. Klyushnev admitted in Zakharov’s office that from the morning on the youngsters had been in a state of agitation, and that after dinner they started shouting a lot and rushing from house to house and then round the buildings so fast that it was impossible to see who was mixed up in the panic. Klyushnev, however, took it to be some usual bit of nonsense like the ant-hill affair, whereas it turned out to be much more serious. So long as it was confined to the ground the operation was accompanied by loud shouts, but when all those participating in it scrambled on the roof their indefatigable throats were closed by some miraculous means. In complete silence the boys, up there above the third storey of the staff-building, threw down a valuable Persian cat, the possession of an office-worker called Semyonov. It was not an act of cruelty or revenge or even of idle curiosity, it was, fundamentally, a scientific experiment, for the cat was attached by two safe, comfortable loops to a parachute which had been pretty well constructed out of a large table napkin. That evening all those who had taken part in the experiment stood in front of Zakharov with guilt written on their

faces, though in their heart of hearts no one shared his indignation. Zakharov looked at them angrily.

“I simply cannot tolerate such a commander on duty. It’s monstrous, it shows an utter inefficiency! I did not expect such spineless conduct from you, Comrade Klyushnev! Take five hours detention!”

Under the eyes of the “parachutists” Vasya Klyushnev acknowledged the sentence, and, highly upset, raised his arm in salute. Then Semyon Gaidovsky made a feeble attempt to put the incident in its true light.

“Alexei Stepanovich!” he chanted in a voice full of despair. “But we found the napkin! We really did. And we’ll wash it!”

Zakharov, however, showed no signs of being pleased that the napkin had been found. He seemed even to have forgotten that the napkin had been removed secretly from the kitchen, though it was this stage in the operation that had been considered the most dangerous by the plotters. No, it was not the napkin Zakharov had in mind.

“What is the meaning of this?” he asked. “A dozen colonists go barging up to the roof of a three-storey building! What for? To drop that ill-fated cat down!”

The boys’ eyes lit up with happiness. Alexei Stepanovich was exaggerating the mishap! Why, there hadn’t been one at all!

“But Alexei Stepanovich, haven’t you heard? She’s all right! She made a splendid landing,” Gaidovsky sang out.

And all the other boys began to shout: “She landed! She didn’t even utter a meow! You can’t call that dropping her! She had a parachute, hadn’t she? She landed on all four legs... and off she ran... just got up and bolted!”

Everybody expected Zakharov’s face to beam with joy at the news, looked at him expectantly but—there was’ no beam on his face. He was obviously not capable of revelling in the successes of parachuting.

“Yes, the cat had a parachute,” he barked, after adjusting his pince-nez. “But what about you? How many of you had parachutes, tell me?”

Only then did the boys realize that the crime they had committed was in going on the roof without parachutes. So Zakharov did know something about parachuting after all. A pity he didn’t understand that you need a very big parachute for a human being and that a napkin is no use for that!

Nobody went up on the roof again after that incident, of course, but there were always other things turning up. It was the things that “turned up” which gave the commanders on duty their misgivings and made them detest the separatist activities of the fourth detachment.

During the last few days, life in the colony suddenly ran into a calm patch, nobody boomed deafeningly for Volodya, youngsters were not seen going about in flocks, and nobody flew all over the place with excited chatter. The pond managed to freeze over and electric lights could be seen reflected on its surface. The colonists skated hand in hand or alone, some gliding round and round the rink, others dashing impetuously across it. Even

the commanders on duty were sometimes to be seen on skates, their red arm bands visible from afar and, as usual, commanding respect.

But the fourth detachment was never there. Volodya Begunok employed every suitable opportunity to leave the office and it was always to meet someone from the fourth detachment near-by. They would talk, or, perhaps, they didn't have to talk but merely moved some invisible feelers like ants do. That nobody knew, but it happened that after each encounter they would go off in different directions, in no hurry, looking thoughtful, and generally frowning a little. An onlooker might have assumed that there was nothing in their lives to interest them and that they were living in a world of their own. But everywhere people went in the colony, the lads of the fourth detachment would be seen hanging about in twos or threes, quietly conferring and still more quietly on the look-out for something. In the cloak-room, especially of a morning, there was always a pair of eyes roving over the crowd of people putting their coats on. The habit of running to work without a coat had long since been abandoned. On the contrary, the fourth detachment had started robing and disrobing itself so frequently that the older sentries used to complain:

"Why do you keep popping in and out? Put your coats on and be off with you!"

Perhaps Zakharov noticed himself that something mysterious was going on in the fourth detachment or perhaps he learnt of it some other way, but the fact remained that he too acquired the habit of strolling about the yard and the corridors and looking into the cloak-room, where he always happened to meet a member of the fourth detachment. He would reply to the salute with a diffident gesture and walk on, followed by serious and attentive glances.

One evening Vanya Galchenko and Filka Shary do not go to the skating-rink but walk along the main path in the park, looking from time to time towards the buildings as if they are waiting for someone. Other colonists, boys and girls with no thoughts in their heads except how to amuse themselves, run past them with skates in their hands. The seniors are in less of a hurry. Lida Talikova lays a friendly hand on Vanya's shoulder and asks: "What's the matter, Vanya?"

It is hard not to respond to Lida's friendliness, but Vanya's smile is formal: "Nothing's the matter. We're just taking a walk."

The two boys' eyes light up when they see Ryzhikov coming round the corner from "B" Wing. He has even improved in looks, this Ryzhikov. There is something quite stylish in the way he walks in his new white sweater, without a cap. He takes long strides and sways a little as he walks—the gait of a fellow who is pleased with life. Now that his ginger hair has been trimmed short he looks smarter about the head and his face seems clean. Ryzhikov is in no hurry, he takes out a cigarette and lights up. Without any fuss Vanya and Shary turn down a side-path. Ryzhikov does not notice them. He strolls down the main path and carelessly tosses a large white box on a snow-drift. When he has passed out of sight behind the trees Shary picks up the box.

"It's a cigarette box," remarks Vanya. "What kind?"

"Dyubek."

"It's a nice box."

Half an hour later, they come across Malenky in the club-room.

"How much does a box like this cost?" Shary asks him casually, turning the box over in his hands.

"Oh, those cigarettes are very expensive. A box like that costs five roubles."

Vanya cannot contain his excitement.

"Five roubles!" he shouts for all the room to hear. "One box?"

"What do you expect?" says the more experienced Shary in low tones, "'Dyubeks' aren't just ordinary fags." "Ooh!"

Maleriky leaves them for the library. "He did it! I know he did," says Vanya. "Pinched the coats, you mean?" "Yes, and then sold them."

"But don't forget he earns more than anybody else." "I know, but how much does he get. Thirty roubles, isn't it? Thirty!"

"That's right. Or even forty."

"Well, it's all the same. These cigarettes alone cost five roubles,"

"We'll have to find, out. Come on. He's in the first detachment, isn't he?" "Yes."

"Look here, you know everybody, you *ask* what kind of cigarettes Ryzhikov smokes."

"What For?"

"If nobody knows, it means Ryzhikov's smoking them on the quiet and doesn't tell anybody. You ask, go on!"

Before the evening is out Shary has discovered that no one in the first detachment knows what brand of cigarettes Ryzhikov smokes. Shary, the good actor he is, knows how to put his questions. He just happens to be interested to know what the first detachment's favourite smoke is. After supper Vanya listens to Shary's story and whispers loudly: "You see, nobody knowst Now, do you want to see a good show?"

"Show? Where?"

"Oh, somewhere around here."

They take a long walk about the colony but Vanya can't provide the promised "show." The cigarette box lies in his pocket as patiently as Shary awaits the "show."

People are beginning to gather in the Quiet Room before the general meeting. Ryzhikov comes in by himself and takes a seat on the bench, stretching his legs before him. Vanya gives Shary a nudge. The two boys pass Ryzhikov twice. He takes no notice of them and goes on staring at his feet, whistling faintly. Shary and Vanya sit down beside him. Ryzhikov looks at them out of the corner of his eye and tucks his feet under the bench. Vanya is holding the "Dyubek" box in his hands, turning it over 'and over and narrowing his eyes-Then he opens the lid and grows rigid with attention as he watches Ryzhikov. Scrawled inside the box in big blue crayoned letters stand out the words:

We Know All

Ryzhikov's green eyes flash, he rises to his feet, shoves Vanya back with a firm hand, and goes to the door with his hands in his pockets. Vanya rubs his shoulder and pulls a face:

“Ouch, it hurts... the devil!”

“He’s our man!” says Shary, now quite red in the face. “You know it’s him, Vanya! Come on, let’s go and tell Alexei....”

They run for the office. But there are a lot of people there and the commanders have come in to report. Zakharov is in a good mood, laughing.

“Make the meeting short tonight,” he says to Torsky. “It’s too good to spoil.”

And at the general meeting Torsky reads out this announcement:

“Probationer Ryzhikov is thanked for exemplary shock-work in the foundry.”

Shary and Vanya are highly upset. The colour rushes to their cheeks. They look at Ryzhikov and can scarcely recognize him. He shines with pride and confusion, there is dignity in his smile, he has shed all his arrogance. He is a comrade who has earned a mention in the order of the day.

PART THREE

31

Operational Report

The winter was over.

The Komsomol bureau and Commanders’ Council burned the midnight oil over their deliberations....

“Just think of it, we are going to make electric drills!” Mark Grinhaus held forth. “You’ve seen the kind of drills they are. Polished aluminium outside, and made to ten micron precision inside. Besides that, they’re being imported now. You know what that means. Isn’t it enough to make you sick? To have to beg the Austrians for drills for our aircraft factories, for our sappers and engineering units! Imagine what happens if our sappers have to bridge a river and they’ve no electric drills. Or say it’s a question of making a tank and we have God knows what in our hands instead of drills! And now take aircraft. I’ve seen them, I know how many holes ‘have to be drilled in making them. Is it right that we should have to use Austrian tools when we can have our own, made here in this colony? We must consider the situation of our workers! ‘We must realize what, it means—when we hear the word ‘need,’ a word that you can’t pronounce without wanting to “cry.

Oh, it really is a shame to have to buy drilling tools from Austria, especially when we have to pay for the disgrace in real gold! That’s what ‘need’ means. I understand that and so do you!”

Naturally everybody understood. That was why what Volenko had to say at the bureau expressed what all eleven detachments thought about the matter.

“There’s no need for us to worry about whether the colonists will understand the situation,” Volenko said. “We have seventy-nine Komsomol members and one hundred and ninety with colonist rank. Of course they will understand. As things are now we eat two suppers—at live o’clock and at eight. Everybody’s been against that for a long time. What is the point in eating supper twice, it’s a sheer waste of

time. I admit that the first supper is more like tea. All the same we eat an enormous amount of bread there. And nobody in the colony likes the arrangement. We ought to cancel the first supper and leave the colonists more time. Now the meat question. It was proved a long time ago that too much meat is bad for the health. Gives you gout the doctor says. I consider meat three times a week to be enough and that if you have it more often it's bad for you. Further, there's no need to have new uniforms made for this First of May. The main thing is that we drill well and look good on parade. People will like it even if we wear the old uniforms. The white collars are frayed. It'd cost a hundred and fifty roubles to have new ones made. Why bother about them? Leave off the collars and we're still in uniform. The chief thing's the badge. And we needn't buy new boots, we can put everybody in sports -shoes, they're much cheaper and anyway they're lighter on the feet."

And they found many other items in the life of the colony which they could do without for aesthetic and hygienic reasons.

Zakharov accepted all the cuts in expenses proposed by the Komsomol members; even the first supper was cancelled, much to everyone's satisfaction. The colonists were fully convinced that by the end of the year they would amass not 300,000 roubles but a good deal more.

In the vestibule, near the entrance to the dining-ball, half the wall had been occupied since midwinter by a huge diagram prepared by Malenky and the art circle-There was a crowd in front of this diagram at all times of the day because what it had to show touched everyone to the quick.

The diagram depicted a front, a real war-front. The offensive began from the bottom. There, a narrow red tape represented the mighty forces of the colony's workshops, disposed in three armies. The metal-workers held the centre; with the carpenters on their left flank and the girls of the dressmaking-shop on their right. Each army occupied a sector of the whole front in strict proportion to the scale of the annual plan.

The metal-workers in the centre formed the main forces, of course. The annual production plan for oilcans made up a highly respectable figure—a million pieces, in other words, a million roubles. The sector on the left flank was narrower. The carpenters had to turn out 750,000 roubles worth of production. The dressmakers, their number considerably weakened by the flow of hands to the turners' lathes, had a plan of only 300,000 rubies. As a result the right flank occupied a relatively small sector of the front.

At the top, across the entire breadth of the sheet of drawing-paper was the objective towards which the front moved upwards—a beautiful city where towers and chimneys rose skywards, and, lest there should be any doubt about it, these words:

*THE FIRST ELECTRIC TOOL FACTORY
OF THE FIRST OF MAY LABOUR COLONY*

The narrow red tape ran rather low down on the diagram, and the beautiful city stood very high up. It was going to be no easy matter to reach it. A vast expanse of paper had to be crossed. From edge to edge of the diagram stretched horizontal lines, -each representing a day and forming all together the great staircase of a working year. Ah, how many of these days there are in a year and how gradually they are consumed! Each day

was marked in handsome interlacing 'Cyrillic 'Characters, one above the other in narrow columns at each side of the diagram. On a level with the beautiful city stood:

December 31!!!

There stood the date—with its three exclamation marks. December 31, just think of it, when the month of March was not yet out and there were such a lot of other months that came before December. The sight of this remarkable diagram when it was first set up in the vestibule in its frame of gold and crimson stunned the colonists both by its scope and its complexity. They understood 'the general idea—the beautiful city had to be reached and the first to get there would plant the first flag on one of the city's towers. Other details were less fully understood. However, it took but a few days to master the diagram and to begin reacting to the changes marked on it. The front line, represented by the thin red ribbon, advanced slowly upwards. Every day a small piece of paper announcing the day's operational results was pinned next to the board.

The diagram was not confined to showing the colonists' battle-front. A blue thread represented the enemy's line. Everyone was fully aware of the fact that their main enemy was time. If only there were a hundred working hours in a day then there would be really something to show! There were other enemies too—the poor quality material, the inefficient machines, the wretched tools. . The operational report of March 25 ran:

"Yesterday the front was quiet. In the central sector output amounted to 3,300 roubles and the line of March 29 was reached, establishing today's front four stages ahead of schedule. On the left flank the carpenters were still halted on the line of March 15, since when not a single kopek's worth of production has been recorded. On the right flank the pursuit of routed enemy units continues: our female forces are engaged in stubborn battle on the positions of April 18, having outflanked the Blues. In that sector the enemy is in headlong retreat, our trophies amounting to 1,800 roubles in a single day's operation. . .

"Notwithstanding the poor progress of the carpenters our constant successes on the right flank have forced the enemy to withdraw its forces all along the front to the line of March 26. This means that the colony -as a whole is one day ahead of its plan."

Vanya Galchenko and the other metal-workers of the fourth detachment were fond of taking up their stand before the diagram of an evening and admiring the successes on the central sector. The Blues were obviously in poor shape under the blows of the foundry-workers and turners. Admittedly, the girls were in an intolerably good position: on the right flank the red ribbon went shooting up to the line of April 18. And today was only-March 25! The girls did not even bother to stop and look. They just threw a glance at it as they ran by, being too shy to gloat over their dizzy success. The youngsters looked at the girls with forced diffidence. Lena Ivanova and Lyuba Rotshtein only stopped to see how the metal-workers were smarting with envy.

"The skirts have an easy time," said Vanya. "Nothing to do but make shorts!"

"How dare you call us skirts?" retorted Lena, accepting the challenge.

"I didn't mean anything, 'I only—well, what are shorts after all?"

"After all, 'I like that! Can you make shorts?"

Vanya glanced at his comrades. Fancy being asked an insulting question like that in the presence of men!

“Huh! Me make shorts!”

Vanya was blushing. Really, it was difficult to carry on a conversation with these girls. On the one hand they were skirts, when all was said and done, and they did sew shorts. On the other hand even these thirteen-year-old Lena and Lyuba stood there and laughed at him with ribbons in their hair tied in bows to make them look prettier. Their black stockings and shoes and their sharp bright eyes all made them somehow different and helped them to put on airs.

“Sewing shorts,” Vanya grumbled on. “That’s what you’re cut out for.”

“Just listen to him! It’s just that you don’t know how to do it yourself. But what about Wanda and Oksana? They work on lathes, don’t they?”

Vanya turned away from the diagram, wishing he could run off into the yard to look for less disturbing encounters. Wanda and Oksana made a hundred and twenty oil-cans in four hours, that was true. But how did they manage it? Only because Blum put them on to the best machines and because they were always the first to have their machines repaired and because they had the best cutting-tools and because of other injustices. But it was no good talking about that, because once when there was talk about it, it had led to standing and blinking “before Zakharov and listening to him saying: “I can’t For, the life of me imagine where this caddishness comes from! What reason have you to give yourselves airs before the .girls? Because you wipe your noses on your sleeves? Or is there some other reason? Perhaps you’re greater tittle-tattles? You gather like magpies and rattle your tongues—the girls’ lathes are better, they’ve got better cutting-tools.... Once it used to be said that women were the gossipers but now it looks as if men have taken over the role!”

This was followed by scarcely audible sighs from the boys, who hastened to agree with Zakharov. But all the same the girls still got the best of things. When Petka Kravchuk asked for his chuck to be repaired, do you think it was done? But when Wanda burst into tears over a twisted wrench, it took Volonchuk less than an hour to find her a new one. So Vanya was in low spirits when he walked off towards the door and ran straight... into a violent argument going on between Chernyavin and Porshnev.

“Oil-cans! What are they when you come to think of it,-Signer? A chunk of rotten copper which you scratch on the sides.”

“Did you read the report?” Porshnev replied with a gentle smile. “Three thousand three hundred of these chunks! There’s keeping to plan for you! And you’re stuck at March 15! Think of it, March 15!”

“Stuck, you say? But have you any idea what a drawing-desk is? It’s not an oil-can, I can tell you. All you have to do is to stick the can in a chunk and it does the rest by itself—in a minute you shove in another one and it’s ready again—call that work? But it takes a whole week to make a table, and not just one fellow but five or six of us. You wait till we’ve made the first set and then you’ll sing another tune.”

Vanya went back to the diagram. He can’t stand hearing such nonsense: does it by itself, indeed!

““Not a single kopek’s worth of production,” he began to sing out.

That caught Igor's ear. Vanya Galchenko—his bosom friend—was reproaching him too!

"Will you take a bet that we'll have overtaken you in a week's time, Porshnev?" Igor asked.

"Not me," Porshnev replied calmly.

"Why not?"

"It's no good betting on it. You'll get flustered and hurry and then you'll spoil the job."

This made Vanya laugh loud and long. Porshnev had got in a good one then, a very powerful blow. Last month an entire set of lecture-hall desks, had been rejected by the control committee, Shtivel himself had been given a rough time at a general meeting while Chernyavin had sat there and kept mum. That was why Igor now shrugged his shoulders confusedly and said without much assurance:

"Of course it's not like making oil-cans."

One day in early winter, when Igor was out skiing with Vanya in the woods, they were overtaken by Ryzhikov. Vanya hurried ahead.

"I suppose we'll be reading in the order of the day about' you being thanked again!" said Igor with slight sarcasm.

"As if I needed your thanks!" replied Ryzhikov.

Ryzhikov had no desire to go on talking to Igor. Who, after all, was Igor Chernyavin? So Ryzhikov pushed on and as he passed Vanya, toppled him into a snow-drift with a deft touch of his ski. The while Vanya struggled to get up Ryzhikov stood over him laughing. Vanya took it quite calmly and merely said: "There's no need to trip me up. There's room for everyone here."

Igor, however, dashed up in a rage. Without uttering a word he gripped Ryzhikov by the throat and hurled him head over heels into the snow. As he went down Ryzhikov heard Igor say: "Isn't one warning enough for you? Next time you'll be black and blue!"

Ryzhikov was in such a state that he couldn't even get out of the deep powdery snow. He turned a baleful look on Igor.

"Sorry, sir, I'm afraid I upset you," said Igor with a polite bow, and went on his way.

Vanya set off in his tracks. Then he paused for a moment.

"Don't worry about that, Ryzhikov. I'm not angry with you for spilling me. Oh not There's another reason."

"What are you talking about?" Ryzhikov asked ominously.

But Vanya was not scared because Igor was waiting for him, looking over his shoulder.

"Oh, something else," Vanya continued.

"What's that?" demanded Ryzhikov.

"You'll find out later."

Ryzhikov turned round and shot away into the woods. What was Vanya talking about? What right had he to talk like that anyway? Ryzhikov had lately become the uncrowned king of the foundry-shop. Bankovsky even trusted him with the drum if he happened to be called away. Now that Nesterenko had moved to the mechanical-shop Ryzhikov had taken his place at the moulding machine. Volenko often gave him a laudatory pat on the back.

“Well done, Ryzhikov, well done,” he would say. “We’ll make a real foreman out of you. You’re going to be a real man some day! If you could only do better at school. . . .”

“Oh, it’s too late for me to start studying, Volenko!”

But Volenko, supported by the entire first detachment, was convincing Ryzhikov that it was never too late to study. He began to pore over his lessons of an evening, for he did not want to forfeit the good-will of the first detachment. It contained some estimable colonists: Spiridon Radchanko—the tall, powerful, level-headed assistant-foreman of the mechanical-shop,

Sadovnichy—lean, tall, erudite and educated, Moisei Blomberg—the best pupil of the tenth form, Ivan Kolesnikov—the right-hand of Mark Grinhaus in Komsomol work, editor of the wall-newspaper and artist—all of them leading Komsomol members. The first detachment also had its younger members who had only just emerged from the impetuous company of the small fry and were already launching on their respectable colonists’ career with serious faces and beautifully trim hair-cuts: Kasatkin, Khromenko, Grossman, Ivanov the fifth, Petrov the first. Even Samuel Nozhik began to show himself in the ranks of the activists and played a highly important role in the literary and model-making circles. Though it was not customary to use nicknames in the colony, Nozhik was frequently referred to by one. From the day he arrived at the colony two years before, he astonished one and all by his gay and genial manner of lodging protests. He stood in awe of no person or thing and once, having refused to serve as detachment monitor, replied to Zakharov’s written invitation to call on him by scrawling in large letters across the corner of the note the word: “Refused.”

That made Zakharov roar with laughter. Then he sent for Nozhik and, still laughing, grasped him by the shoulders.

“A delightful fellow, Comrade Nozhik!” he exclaimed.

Nozhik really was a delightful fellow: he was always smiling and completely at ease.

“Very well, then,” said Zakharov after a good laugh. “There’s no doubt about your being a delightful fellow, all the same you’ll have to do a couple of punishment tasks for writing this resolution.”

So Nozhik frowned slyly and said: “Very good, Comrade Director.”

This was followed by many other ingenious pranks which though spoiling the mood of the first detachment commanders did not make Nozhik himself unpopular. And as he settled down in the colony and made friends, his ingenuity was usually directed to some common cause. Nevertheless, the nickname “Refused” stuck for a long time.

Ryzhikov had not been in the colony more than a few days before he tried to get friendly with Nozhik, but he met with a resistance that was at once evasive and polite.

“Huh, I see you’re on the side of the colony,” said Ryzhikov scornfully.

"I'm on nobody's side except my own," replied Nozhik with a shrug.

"Then what are you up to?"

"Me, what do you mean?"

"Why do you put yourself out of the way so much?"

"Well, I like it here."

"You mean to say you like Zakharov?"

"Oh, yes, very much!"

"What for?"

"Because of something that happened."

"What was that?"

Nozhik's large sly-looking eyes became mere chinks in his face as he began to tell his tale: "Well, it was more like a miracle than anything else. That was when I got to like him. The lights went out here. Tight through the colony, the whole town too. Something went wrong at the power-station. We went into the office and sat around—a lot of chaps, on all the 'Settees and on the floor too. Everybody talked about the Civil War. Zakharov told stories, and so did that fellow Malenky. Then Alexei Stepanovich said: 'How awful it is to have no light. There's work to be done and no light. What a wretched business!' Then, he went on sitting and sitting and then burst out again: 'I want light, damn it!' That made us laugh, Then he suddenly said, loudly: 'Now we'll get some light. Come on, one, two, three!' And no sooner had he said 'three' than the lights came in! Everywhere! Ooh, didn't we laugh and clap him then. Zakharov laughed too and said: 'You've got to know the knack, and that's something you fellows don't know!'"

Nozhik told this with a mischievous expression on his face, then, opening his eyes wide, added:

"So you see?"

"See what?" Ryzhikov retorted scornfully. "Are you trying to tell me he can give orders to the light?"

"No, not that," Nozhik drawled gaily. "It wasn't a matter of giving orders. It just happened that way. But nobody else would have done it like that." "Oh yes, they would."

"No, they wouldn't. They'd have flunked it. They'd have reasoned like this: What if I say one, two, three and nothing happens? The boys will laugh at me. But Zakharov, you see, wasn't afraid of that. And besides, he was—well—lucky to get the light at that very minute. And I like lucky people."

.. Ryzhikov listened with surprise to 'this ingenious prattle without being able to make out whether Nozhik was joking or in earnest. The conversation left him feeling dissatisfied.

"Lucky? What nonsense!" he commented. "Anyway, what's it got to do with you?"

"It's like this: he's lucky and I'm lucky with him. That suits me fine. I like that."

Nozhik even smacked *his* lips over this.

By this time Nozhik had become a prominent figure in the colony. His relations with Ryzhikov, like those of the other members of the first detachment, were good. Levitin alone avoided contact with Ryzhikov and looked at him in an unfriendly way. Well, that didn't matter. Who was Levitin after all? The same sort of riff-raff as Vanya Galchenko. But Chernyavin . . . that remained to be seen.

Later that winter Ryzhikov had another occasion to exchange words with Chernyavin. This happened on the way to town, where Ryzhikov was going for an outing. At the end of the road through the woods he overtook Igor and Vanya Galchenko just when the three of them had to skip out of the way of the lorry, which was coming back from town. In the cabin next to the driver sat Wanda. She looked out of the window and nodded to them merrily.

"Where've you been, Wanda?" Vanya shouted.

"We've been to fetch some planks," Wanda replied.

Over her shoulder the boys could see the dark-skinned sharp-nosed face of driver Vorobyov. The lorry drove on towards the colony. Ryzhikov looked after them.

"That oughtn't to be allowed," he protested. "What's she riding about with him for?"

"Why shouldn't she?" asked Vanya.

"And flirting with the driver, do you think that's all right?"

"She's not flirting," Vanya replied hotly. "She never flirts."

"A lot you know about it!"

"He knows more than you do," said Igor so sternly that Ryzhikov thought it prudent to edge away from him.

"My advice to a stinker like you is to get out of the colony," Igor continued.

Ryzhikov did not say anything on that occasion and hurried off to town. Now, at the end of the winter, Igor perhaps would not describe Ryzhikov as a stinker. Wanda's partiality for the driver had been noticed by the whole colony. Pyotr Vorobyov was a general favourite. He had not much to say but was an assiduous reader. There were always plenty of books in the cabin of his lorry—on the seat, tucked into the roof of the driving cabin and in the door flaps. Vorobyov read at the wheel and sitting about when off duty—so much that his renown as a reader outshone Igor Chernyavin's. And this Pyotr Vorobyov, so earnest a fellow, such an assiduous reader, so lean and dark, was certainly in love with Wanda. They were often seen sitting beside each other in the Quiet Room. Wanda would spend her spare time in the driving cabin of the lorry, and finally Vorobyov even took up skating. They used to skate together, exchanging rare words. Ryzhikov had something to crow about—the entire colony was concerned about this tender passion that had come into their midst like a bolt from the blue.

"I tell you Wanda's in love with Vorobyov!" Misha Gontar said to Igor one day.

"You're wrong!"

"No, I'm not! You can't kid me! Oh, I can spot a thing like that at once!"

And, really, he seemed to be right, for one day when he was out skating, Igor found, himself close to the pair without them noticing him.

“Aren’t you afraid of him, Wanda?” he overheard Vorobyov say.

“Of Zyriansky? Of course, who isn’t?”

Wanda had grounds for fearing Zyriansky. A few days later Igor was on the ice with him. Wanda and Vorobyov were skating some way off.

“I can’t stand this any longer,” Zyriansky exclaimed and shot ahead after the pair, closely followed by Igor. Wanda looked round sharply and darted away from her companion, leaving him to face Zyriansky alone. For all his earnestness Vorobyov was at a loss when he felt Zyriansky’s baleful eyes on him. “Drop it, Pyotr, I’m telling you.”

“What’s wrong?” the driver said in confusion, averting his eyes.

“Drop it! What are you turning the girl’s head for? I’ll have you before a general meeting if I catch you two together again.”

Vorobyov shrugged, flashed a look at Zyriansky and looked away again.

“I’m not a colonist....”

“I’ll show you what you are. As long as you’re working at the colony you’ve no right to mess up our work. I mean what I say.”

“I’m not doing anything bad....”

“We’ll take care of that, you needn’t worry! Are you in love with her?”

“Where did you get that idea from?”

“Well, if you’re not in love with her why do you hang around her?”

Vorobyov shifted his right skate about on the ice and asked, not without irony:

“Well, all right. What if I am in love with her?”

Zyriansky started back indignantly.

“Aha, so you admit it, do you? You’ll catch it, being in love! You’ll not know yourself when you look in the mirror!”

Vorobyov wagged a finger to and fro comically.

“I see. I’m forbidden to be in love and forbidden not to be in love. Is that it?”

Zyriansky was taken aback for a brief moment. But he had to put this Vorobyov in his place, no matter what the nature or the depth of the feelings that stirred, in his driver’s soul!

“You keep away from her! Wanda’s not for you!”

“Keep away, eh?” Vorobyov pondered.

“That’s right.”

“And who am I allowed to go up to?”

“Me! I’ve no objections to that.”

It was not easy to guess what Vorobyov thought about the proposal that he should substitute Zyriansky for Wanda. At any rate, he pondered a little longer, then said:

“You do things a funny way, comrades!”

All the same, look as they might, the colonists did not see Wanda with the driver after that. Not in the Quiet Room or in the lorry or on the skating-rink. The only thing that worried them was how to account for the fact that Wanda went about just as happily as ever. She even sang and even in the work-shop too! Vorobyov too seemed to be in better spirits. He became more talkative, and his cheeks looked *as* if they had become rosier.

3

An Interesting Sum

In April a lot of bricklayers arrived and the construction of the factory went ahead fast. The boys had scarcely time to collect their wits before the scaffoldings were already two storeys high. It was to be a very large building with various offshoots; around the site a whole town of incongruously jumbled things shot up — sheds, ‘huts, barrels, storehouses, pits and all sorts of builders’ refuse. The older colonists looked on quietly when they came in the evenings to stand near the building-site, but the fourth detachment were less calm: the scaffolding, the walls, the passages drew them like a magnet, the youngsters just had to talk to every bricklayer and see how he was going about his work. They found the bricklayers willing to converse and to reveal the secrets of their trade. But the higher the building rose the less there was to talk about. All topics had been more or less exhausted, but very many interesting corners were now appearing in the growing building. The bricklayers started to complain.

“What the devil are you doing up here?” they would protest. “One false step and that’ll be the end of you!”

“I won’t fall.”

“You will and then you’ll have to be carried home in a sack.”

“I’ll carry myself home all right . . .”

“You’ll kill yourself and then they’ll be crying about you.”

“Nobody’ll cry for me”

“Your parents will, won’t they?”

“My parents? Fiddlesticks!”

“Well, what about your comrades here?”

“Do you think they’d cry? They’ll play a funeral march all ‘right, but why should they cry?”

“Oh, you’re a rum lot.... Come on, now, quick march before I take my shovel to you.”

“Now then, less of that talk about shovels! I’ll go on my own. Why shouldn’t I? Do you think it’s so interesting up here?”

It was .not so much a question of being turned off the site but of having so much to attend to in other .places and of keeping an eye on the diagram, where, perhaps, the latest report from the front had been put up.

“Situation at the Front on April 15

“On the right flank, the girls fulfilling their daily programme by 170-180 per cent, fought their way to the line of May 17 and are developing their attack on the -enemy, who are in disorderly retreat. According to a Front H. Q. ordinance the heroic struggle waged on the right flank for the new factory is to be given an honourable mention and the Revolutionary Red Flag hoisted on that flank.

“In the centre, pressure on the Blues is being maintained. Today the line of April 21 was reached, our troops having advanced six moves today. “On the left flank, however, the disgraceful lull continues, with the carpenters still at a halt on the line of March 15, one month behind time-table.

“In spite of this, the enemy has been obliged by the pressure on the central and especially the right flank to fall back even on the left flank to the line of April 20. The colony as a whole is four days ahead of its plan.

“Go ahead, girls! Well done! Congratulations to the fifth and eleventh detachments.”

There was a crowd before the diagram, making it difficult to reach the wall. You had to jump up or slip under people’s elbows to see it.

“Ugh! Those carpenters!” shouted Vanya.

“It’s killing,” Begunok supported him.

Igor Chernyavin would have done better to keep away like the other carpenters did. He came up only because ‘he belonged to the H. Q. as editor of the operational report and found it interesting to read his own composition. Nevertheless he had to defend himself, albeit with old methods that had long since been discredited.

“You just don’t understand, Signori! You are all turners. You try and make a drawing-desk I”

“It’s a veritable nightmare!” said Vanya. “Look what it says there: ‘One month behind time-table.’”

“Fine one you are to criticize! You don’t know how to make tables. What are you pestering us for?” This from the offended Gorokhov who was somewhere behind.

“It’s killing!” Begunok repeated. “It’s awful to look at that left flank! Left flank indeed! Now the skirts are doing fine, aren’t they, Wanda?”

“I’m no skirt. I’m a metal-worker.”

Even the new boy, the sixth detachment’s recent recruit, the red-eared be freckled Podvesko looked at the diagram. Perhaps he too envied the right flank where the little red flag stood so decoratively. But perhaps not, for the commander of the sixth, Shura Zheltuikhin, was highly dissatisfied with the newcomer.

“Oh, what a brat you’ve landed me with!” he complained to the Council. “I’m going to have some trouble with this Podvesko, I can see!”

Now April has come and the days are noticeably longer and the twilight hours much pleasanter. Yesterday it still seemed to be winter with coats hanging up in the cloak-room and the windows sealed fast. But today the old German gardener has discarded his jacket to work in the flower-beds, the walks in the park are being swept by a mixed squad—one member from each detachment—and the window-sills are occupied by whole companies of boys and girls who look from their perches down to the drying ground.

April, however, had its misfortunes too. Everything seemed to be going splendidly in the colony. The mysterious disappearance of the overcoats had been forgotten. But suddenly there came a day when the commander of the sixth detachment was robbed of ten roubles, stolen with a purse out of his trouser-pocket during the night, while a big cloth curtain, worth several hundred roubles, disappeared from the theatre. Zakharov walked about with black surly looks and it was said that he had told someone that he would send for a dog to put on the thief's trail.

The small fry were certain he meant it and scrutinized every dog that ran about in the colony. But Zakharov did not send for the dog; he laid the question before a general meeting. The colonists gathered in an oppressive silence and nobody wanted to speak. Mark Grinhaus addressed them.

"A shameful and disgraceful thing has happened, comrades!" he began. "It is a disgrace for us to have to let it be known in town that a stage curtain can be stolen in the First of May Colony without the thief being caught. We must get to the bottom of this matter. All of us have to keep an eye open. And here we sit like a lot of dolts! Why, before long we'll have the safe pinched from under our noses!"

"The safe won't be pinched," burst out Zyriansky. "It stands in the vestibule and there's a sentry there day and night. That's not the question. You surely don't suggest we should drop all work and put a guard beside every scrap of rag in the place, do you? We've got to get it into our heads that there's a snake of a criminal at work here. He doesn't want to creep about in the town where everything's under lock and key and they have sentries and militiamen everywhere. So he comes creeping in here, makes himself out to be one of our comrades while he finds his way about everywhere, eats at one table with us, works here, sleeps here. How can we protect ourselves against that? By keeping our eyes skinned? For whom? Do you want us to suspect everybody in the colony, put locks on everything and post sentries? Don't ask me to watch out, I've never learned how to, but I tell you this: one day I'll get my hands on that snake. . . ."

Zyriansky could not finish, he could not find words to express what he meant to do with those hands of his.

Then Ryzhikov asked to be heard. The week before he had been given the title of colonist. But it was not just because he was a colonist that Ryzhikov raised his voice. It was because he knew something.

"There's something I've noticed, comrades," he began. "When I was coming back from town yesterday—it was my day off—I saw that new 'kid coming through the woods and looking round all the time. So I stopped him and told him to turn out his pockets. Well, he tried to make off but I caught him and— er—well, just yanked everything out of his pockets. Here's what I found, look."

Out of his own pocket Ryzhikov produced all kinds of things: half a chocolate bar, an automatic pencil, an album of views of the Crimea, the stub of a cinema ticket and two honey cakes. Podvesko was at once pushed into the middle of the floor. His ears appeared to grow even redder.

"What are you doing this for? What makes you think I took it? What d'you pick on me for?"

"Did you buy these things?" asked Torsky.

“Of course I did.”

“Where did you get the money from?”

“My sister sent me some—by—er—post—lots of people saw it arrive.”

This statement was confirmed from all sides of the room. Yes, three days before Podvesko received three roubles by post. Podvesko went on standing in the middle looking virtuous. Torsky was about to wave him back to his seat when Zakharov intervened.

“Did you buy yourself a drink in town, Podvesko? Fruit juice?”

“Yes, I did.”

“Two glasses?”

“Well, yes, two.”

“I see, two glasses. And cakes, let’s see—er—how many did you eat? Four?”

Podvesko averted his eyes from Zakharov and whispered something;.

“Speak up! How many of those cakes did you eat?”

“Er—not four.”

“How many, then?”

“Three.”

“And what do cakes like that cost?”

“Twenty kopeks.”

“Did you take the tram to town?”

“Yes.”

“Paid your fare?”

“Course I did.”

“And back too?”

“Yes.”

“And what did the album cost?”

“I can’t remember,” Podvesko said after a moment’s thought. “Either forty-five or fifty-five kopeks,”

“Forty-five,” at once came a chorus of voices from the benches.

“And the chocolate?”

“I’ve forgotten. I think it was...”

“Eighty kopeks!” several boys prompted. “That’s what ‘Troika’ chocolate costs.”

Zakharov now addressed himself only to the benches.

“Pencil?”

“Forty kopeks that sort.”

“I see. The cinema ticket cost thirty-five kopeks, I notice. Is that right, Podvesko?”

“That’s right,” Podvesko replied dully.

“So what it comes to is that you spent three roubles thirty-five kopeks, Correct?”

“Yes.”

“You had three roubles, didn’t you? Where did the extra thirty-five kopeks come from?”

“I didn’t have any more than three roubles. I spent the three roubles my sister sent me.”

“But that thirty-five kopeks?”

“I didn’t spend it.”

“How much did you spend on sweets?”

“Sweets? What sweets?”

“These. Wrapped in paper. You bought four hundred grammes of them, didn’t you?”

Podvesko turned away again and whispered something. Rudnev dashed into the middle and put his ear to Podvesko’s lips.

“He says it was two hundred grammes.”

“So it turns out you had plenty of money,” said Zakharov with a smile.

Podvesko gave a loud sniff, drew his sleeve across his moist lips and gazed at the ceiling. At his side Rudnev started to reason with him gently: “Now, come on, tell us where you picked up so much money?”

“I didn’t pick it up anywhere. I had three roubles.”

“But don’t you realize that you bought things for more than that?”

Podvesko did not want to realize that. He had three roubles. Everyone had seen him getting the money in an envelope. He was not going to abandon that strong position.

“Maybe you didn’t buy so much?”

Podvesko hurriedly assented. He was only too glad to agree that he had spent less, exactly three roubles, in fact.

“Maybe you didn’t buy a whole bar of chocolate? Just half a bar, eh? The half you kept in your pocket?”

“That’s right.”

“You mean you bought half a bar?” ‘

Podvesko nodded once more.

The general meeting burst out laughing. The fellow no longer presented any problem.

“So you just found your way to that pocket during the night and pinched the purse, didn’t you?” Rudnev asked with the same gentle manner.

And now Podvesko nodded readily because, to tell the truth, he liked the straightforward way the situation had been handled.

Torsky scratched his head and looked at Zakharov with a smile.

“Go back to your place, Podvesko!” he said. “It’s not the last time you’ll steal, I’m sure.”

Podvesko’s eyes suddenly grew sharp. The way Torsky put things carried an offensive insinuation.

“You’ll be stealing again, won’t you?” Torsky went on.

Podvesko sprang to life.

“Word of honour, I won’t. That’s the last time.”

“Why’s that?”

“Because I don’t want to!”

“Ah! Well, all right. Shall we punish him, comrades?”

Podvesko shilly-shallied in the middle—the colonists looked at him with nothing but merriment on their faces. Then Volenko rose and said: “Oh, don’t let’s waste any more time on this freak. Ryzhikov did right to search his pockets because otherwise we’d have suspected someone else. Podvesko’s sure to steal a few more times so we’ll have to keep an eye on him.”

Podvesko laid his little fist to his cheek and craned his neck towards Volenko.

“Word of honour, I’ll never steal again, Comrade Volenko!”

“We’ll see about that. Now let him go, Vitya. What’s the good of letting him wear a hole in the floor out ‘there? It’s not the ten roubles but the curtain we’re interested in. What do we care about Podvesko—ten roubles were left lying about and he pinched them. He thinks that if money’s not under lock and key he can take it and buy himself sweets with it. But the curtain’s another story. How long will it take us to raise the cash to buy another one? Here’s the May Day holiday coming up and we’ve nothing to shut off the stage with. That wasn’t Podvesko’s work. That’s the work of a real enemy; we’ve got to face that. And he wasn’t alone either. You can’t carry a curtain like that into town, let alone try to sell it. That job was done by somebody who knew the ropes, a real skunk. He’s the one we’ve got to find.”

There was prolonged discussion of this question. Nobody voiced any suspicion but everybody concurred angrily that the enemy had to be found and destroyed. They all felt that this enemy was probably sitting among them at that very moment with his ears open, while they had to decide what measures to take against him. For that reason there was general approval of Bratsan’s remarks that no colonist could have committed the crime and that there were two hundred building workers living in the colony whom nobody knew well enough to say what ‘kind of folk they were. They went to the cinema, they had seen the curtain, and probably there were bad lots among them. Perhaps they’d broken in through the window and pinched it that way. It would be easier for them to sell it. Perhaps they’d just cut it up to make suits out of it. There was a building technician called Dem sitting at the meeting, a fellow looking like a big cat with his whiskers sticking out and quivering all the time. He asked to be heard and said: “That’s quite possible, Comrade Colonists, certainly it is. Our folk have come from all over the place. I don’t know them all well yet. The bricklayers are all right, of course, they wouldn’t steal, I can vouch for that, you might say. But as for the unqualified lot, who knows? I wouldn’t vouch for them, you might say.”

All that really looked as if it might be so. Even Zakharov grew thoughtful and looked at Dem with a gleam of hope in his eyes.

4

May Day

Life in the colony went steadily on. At six o'clock in the morning Begunok sounded the reveille:

*The night is o'er!
Who dares snore?
Lazybones, lazybones,
Take up chisel, take up wrench,
Get to your bench,
Hurry, chum,
Work time's come!*

And now the spring sunshine lights the colony's waking hours, as its member's dash about the dormitories and passages, grow quiet during inspection, pour suddenly into the dining-hall and then run off to the shops and class-rooms. The tinkling silence of the work day sets in. During the dinner-hour laughter is heard again and life once more sparkles and hums. And so it remains till evening when the circles gather in the class-rooms and groups of colonists rest in the park while the youngsters dash around. The strains of the band at practice are heard. All these activities, official and social, serious and gay, combine like fine strands in a rope held by the strict well-disciplined monitors who know everything, see everything, and give everything its direction and scope. It may be that in the depth of the commander on duty's heart there always, dwells that deeply secreted and unspoken sense of alarm, which pricks at every colonist when he remembers his plundered theatre. It may be the reason why no one speaks of the missing curtain, not even the commander on duty at the morning inspection of the theatre cleaning.

The May Day celebrations passed like a joyous, heart-felt and serene jubilee. In town the colony marched past the tribunes behind detachments of the armed forces, its splendid-looking platoons participated in the general salute to the strains of Schubert's "Marche Militaire" played by its own band. The tribunes gave the colonists a rapturous welcome, calling out greetings to each platoon in turn. Kreutzer's face wore an expression that left no doubt about his pride in the colony.

Vanya already had a place in the band. The second cornet, on which all he was expected to play was a simple three-note passage, did not, of course, satisfy his ambitions and he was full of envy for those who played first cornets and clarinets and had more interesting and complicated "phrases" than his mere "um-ta-ta." But such is the fate of all musicians: they begin by playing the second cornet and then they play the first.

On May 2 the colony received the visit of a group of military men, all officers and one of them even a high-ranking officer. They took a look round, had supper with the colonists and attended the concert in the evening. Before the concert a general meeting was held. The bust of Stalin was placed on the stage amidst flowers. When the band

played three marches from the balcony, Zakharov gave an order and the banner detachment brought in the standard. During the ceremonial general meeting the colours stood beside the bust of Stalin with an armed sentry on each side. Vanya and Begunok were in this guard of honour. It was both agreeable and frightening to stand there. What if he were to do something wrong all of a sudden? The senior officer delivered a speech on the international situation which ended up like this:

“We also greet your colony because it is taking upon its young shoulders the splendid task of starting an electric tool factory. The Red Army will be proud to accept your production, it will be proud because you will be making tools which we are now having to import from abroad, and not enough of them either, and having to pay for them in gold. It is a splendid thing that your young hands will be making these tools, so much needed for the defence of our country, and that we’ll be able to do without importing them. And later on your hands will grasp rifles; you too will be in the Red Army and stand in defence of our great country. I tell you straight, and I think that all my comrades here this evening will agree with me, that we like the way you live, we like your fine and happy sense of discipline. You have a splendid respect for our Red Flag and everything you do is opportune and done with full conscience. That’s the right way of doing things and we are grateful to you for it.”

Vanya liked hearing these words and he began to imagine what it would be like when the time came for him to be in the Red Army with a rifle in his hand. Let no one think that Vanya didn’t know how to defend his country!

He was so intent not to miss a word of the officer’s speech that he even forgot to go to the dressing-room in time. The commander on duty had to inform him in a whisper that Malenky was looking for him.

Vanya ran to the dressing-room and changed quickly. Malenky made him up, attached a pair of wings to his shoulders and placed an olive branch in his hand. The play, written by Zakharov, was called “The Red Army” and in it Vanya was assigned the role of Peace. It was a difficult role, but not as difficult as the one given to Filka Shary who had persuaded everybody that no one could act the part of a Japanese general as well as he.

The stage’ was crowded with all kinds of bourgeois generals clad with weapons from head to foot and all squabbling about coal and money and so on while poor little Peace went around begging the old buffers for alms.

The generals made fun of Peace and left him to starve. But during their squabbles they hid behind him and shouted: “We want peace!”

Finally Peace was driven to such extremities that he decided he would have to earn a living somehow or other. He acquired a shoeblack’s stand and a set of brushes. The audience was highly amused when Vanya began to clean the various generals’ jack-boots, asking them before he started: “Black for you?” It was Vanya’s own idea to put this line into the play and Zakharov liked it very much. Cleaning the generals’ boots, however, did not make life any easier for Peace. But meanwhile, the forces of the Red Army beyond the frontier grew larger and larger, with a corresponding growth in the fright of the fascists. Then the time came for Peace to cross the frontier with a face wreathed in smiles. Now a fine life began for Peace. He was given a new shirt and taught

how to handle a machine-gun. And only then did silence descend on the stage as the fascists grew subdued and stood about snarling at the Red Army.

Vanya played Peace with great success. He knew how to howl with grief and to clean boots the right way. He knew how to defend himself cheerfully and manfully in the ranks of the Red Army. After the performance he was taken to meet the senior officer who held him between his knees and said:

“Well done, Vanya Galchenko! You did right in showing that only the Red Army defends peace,- quite right. All those other fire-eaters think of nothing but how to rob the world. Do you know what? Couldn’t it be arranged for you to come and put on your play at our place, eh?”

Vanya was petrified by these thrilling words, and then he darted behind the stage and passed on the officer’s invitation to all. Later, when Zakharov and the officers came back-stage, it was decided that on one of the next free days the drama circle would perform its play in the Red Army House.

And so it happened that a week later buses rolled up and took the band and the drama circle to the Red Army House. The audience was very pleased with the play. The band played Liszt’s Second Rhapsody, selections from “Faust” and “Carmen,” “Caucasian Sketches” and Mussorgsky’s “Hopak” and another piece which enchanted everyone, called “The Musicians’ Strike.” This is what it consisted of: when the conductor, Victor Denisovich, raised his baton, the musicians began to protest that they did not want to play any more, that they were tired out and had had enough. Because they really had been playing a lot the audience took their protests to be genuine. Many people, of course, were shocked at such behaviour but there were others who raised their voices: “Let the kids leave, they ought to have a rest! They really must be tired out!”

Smiling in the front row sat the high-ranking officer who had visited the colony.

“Don’t take any notice of them!” Victor Denisovich told the audience. “They really are an undisciplined lot but I know how to keep a grip on them. Just look, I shall now conduct with my back turned on them and they’ll play like angels without making one mistake!”

The audience grew quiet in anticipation of this original contest between band and conductor. But one voice persisted in shouting: “Let them go! What’s the point in tiring them out?”

“They’re used to it,” said Victor Denisovich.

The high-ranking officer burst into loud laughter. The conductor turned to the turbulent band and thundered: “The Campaign March.”

Crushed by such pitilessness, the band raised its instruments albeit with much grumbling. The audience was drawn to its feet by its curiosity to see how the conductor was going to tame his musicians. Victor Denisovich turned his back on the band and raised his baton. His gesture had its effect: both on the platform and in the body of the hall everybody grew tense. The baton moved and out thundered the gay strains of the “Campaign March.” The baton rose smartly over the conductor’s shoulder. There was pride on his face as he looked down into the hall.

Filka Shary was the first to move. He rose from his chair, made a gesture that expressed his determination to play no more, and went off-stage. Then Jean Griffé left with a similar gesture of protest, followed by Danilo Gorovoy with his bassoon. One after another the musicians quitted the stage, yet the march went on being played and as he revelled in its sounds Victor Denisovich's face continued to wear a touching expression. He still wore that expression when the band had been reduced to three: Vanya, playing his "um-ta-ta," the moaning trombone and the big drum. The audience was reduced to fits of laughter at the conductor's expense, and became quite prostrate when there was nobody left on the stage but the drummer. Only then did everyone understand the point of the turn. Victor Denisovich looked round in alarm and rushed off the stage himself.

Though it could hardly be considered to have any musical value this item of the programme provided the final link between the audience and the colonists. Everybody was laughing as they called for the musicians to take their bow, and they were in high spirits when they invited them and the actors to have supper.

It was a late hour when the buses were announced and the colonists left for home, sped on their way by the hearty farewells of their hosts. That night nobody had much sleep but the working day started at six next morning just the same.

5

The Bayonet Fight

"Situation at the Front on May 10

"Our Red Banner right flank is in energetic pursuit of the defeated enemy. Today the girls reached the line of June 30, thus completing the plan for the second quarter of the year.

"In the centre the metal-workers continue to exert pressure. Fulfilling and over fulfilling their programme, the metal-workers reached the line of May 25, being today 15 days ahead of time-table.

"The left flank remains halted on the line of March 15. But information received from the most authoritative sources (Blum) indicates that a decisive offensive is being prepared on the left flank."

"Situation at the Front on May 12

"The right flank, now engaged on fulfilling its programme for the third quarter of the year, reached the line of July 3. In the centre, pressure continues to be exerted on the Blues. Today's engagements were fought on the line of May 29, 17 days ahead of time-table.

"On the left flank there was uninterrupted artillery fire today—the carpenters are polishing a set of furniture."

"Situation at the Front on May 14

"After fierce bayonet fighting our gallant left flank destroyed the Blues completely, broke through their front and are in active pursuit of the enemy. The following trophies were taken: '700 lecture-hall desks, 500 drawing-desks, 870 chairs. All prisoners of war have been polished and delivered according to order. The Blues are in retreat; our gallant

carpenters today reached the line of May 20 and stand today six days ahead of time-table. This historic engagement is of great importance: the demoralized enemy has fallen far back from the front. Our forces have lost contact! Congratulations on your victory, colonists!”

What a change came over the diagram that day! The blue line of the enemy’s positions was far’, far away. On the girls’ sector it lay quite close- to the beautiful city. It was not only for his “centre” that Vanya Galchenko could feel proud that day. His enthusiasm was roused by the general success of the colony and by the splendid bayonet engagement fought by the carpenters. Vanya was lost in reverie as he gazed at the battle-front. Behind that blue line he was seeing Japanese and other generals glaring from their hiding places with baleful eyes.

“Ah!” he exclaimed with a loud laugh. “See how they’ve run!”

Many carpenters came to look at the diagram that day. True, their flank still lay behind the others, but what a battle that was! The “stadium” could not hold all the furniture, the whole yard around it was crowded with tables and chairs. It had been easy enough to make room for them in the “stadium” before the parts were assembled. But when that was done the furniture grew bulky and overflowed ‘outside.

It was the first time that Blum had come to look at the diagram. Hitherto he had been somewhat contemptuous about it as a kids’ game and would say haughtily:

“Oh, let them have their bit of fun! It’s just another of their Boris Godunovs!”

But now he stood in front of the board and listened with close attention to Igor Chernyavin’s explanation.

“If I understand you correctly,” he said, “there is some sort of enemy in the colony. What are they doing here?”

“The enemy interferes with our work, Solomon Davidovich. They creep right under our hands.”

“You don’t mean to say! Who has the nerve to do that? I suppose it’s the new boys.”

“Not only them, the old ones too. It’s not known who made off with the curtain though I think it was one of the older boys.”

“And what connection is there between the curtain and the factory?”

“Well, then take the question of bad timber. If we’d decent wood to work with we’d have been at least on the line of June 10, don’t you see?”

“If you’d had decent wood ...” said Blum after a moment’s reflection. “With good wood any fool can get on any line he likes and bray like a donkey. But in the first place who’s going to give you decent timber without you being on a planned supply system? And secondly, it’s all the same to the customer what kind of wood his chairs are made of, so long as they are well made and look all right. What other enemies have you got?”

“Bad machines....”

“So you call those enemies tool?”

“Of course we do! Now with good lathes ...”

“What are you trying to tell me—good lathes!, And who do you think is going to work on the bad ones? I suppose you think they ought to be thrown away for scrap?”

“Yes, I do.”

“If you scrap machines like that you’ll have to reckon on amortization charges and that will run you into many *a* kopek, I can assure you. Where will you get your 300,000 from, then?”

“Amortization? What sort of creature is that?”

“It’s a creature that eats money, I can tell you. There’s an enemy for you!”

The appearance in the arena of a new animal naturally upset Igor. But Blum was already in the midst of a crowd of Komsomol members. Vladimir Kolos was not to be intimidated by amortization.

“It’s not certain yet which eats up more money, amortization or bad equipment. I reckon that every day we lose three out of eight working hours during our two shifts through various breakdowns.”

“That’s right,” affirmed Sadovnichy.

“I’d say we lose more than that,” said Rogov.

“Bad equipment is a special way for squeezing the sap out of us,” declared Sancho Zorin in a portentous manner.

Blum span around among all these young people unable to transfix every one of them with his angry eyes: “What a lot of know-alls you are! What sap are you talking about? What has sap to do with the subject anyway? Is anybody squeezing sap out of you? Where is it? Show it to me! I’d like to see this sap with my own eyes. Maybe we can make some use of it!”

“You could use it for filling cracks in the furniture with!”

Sancho Zorin was openly making fun of Blum, but harboured no hostile feelings towards him. He even fingered gently a button on Blum’s old jacket.

“I’m not talking about myself, but in general,” he went on. “Now listen while I explain what I mean.”

“All right, I’m listening.”

“Do you know the general line of the Party?”

“It would be a funny thing if I didn’t, wouldn’t it?”

“Well, what does the Party say? Work like coal-heavers to get a metallurgical industry going, do you hear a heavy metallurgical industry. The means of production! And it’s not going to be done the way those opportunists are saying: with their falling curves and other idiotic ideas. We’ve got to work like coal-heavers, and produce the means of production—metal, lathes, machinery. You see?”

“But what’s sap got to do with it?”

“You know that better than we do, Solomon Davidovich. There weren’t any means of production in Russia in the old days, were there, but you had to work hard, didn’t you?”

“Yes, the work was hard enough.”

“And people lived like beggars, didn’t they? Why was that? Because the means of production were bad. They squeezed the sap out of people without giving them shirts to wear on their backs. When we have decent machinery it’ll be much easier. Life will be fine then! You’re working from six in the morning till mid-night! And that’s bad. Do you .see what I mean? It’s your sap I’m talking about, not mine....”

Blum grew thoughtful and pouted his lips at Zorin. Then he heaved a sigh and said, with a melancholy smile: “All that you say is quite correct, Comrade Zorin, but I shan’t live long enough to see .good means of production. That falling curve *you* mentioned is a beastly thing, I know that all right. But I’m afraid my curve won’t last till we get a metallurgical industry.”

Sancho threw an arm over Blum’s shoulder in an impetuous gesture.

“It’ll last, Solomon Davidovich! Word of honour, it’ll last. You just look!”

A tear trickled down Blum’s wrinkled cheek. He smiled and dashed it away with his thumb.

“Damn this weakness of mine,” he said with vexation. “You won’t let on, will you?”

“Don’t you worry; you just take a look at the front. Now take that bayonet fight. And this new factory! We’re almost there! And the enemy runs and runs and runs, as the song goes!”

“He may be running all right but we’ve got to look out where we are going to land with this new factory. Oh, the expenses, they’re simply terrible! One hundred bricklayers, just think of it!”

“We’ll manage it. Do you know where we’re going to land? You’ll die when I tell you, Solomon Davidovich!”

“That won’t do, Comrade Zorin!”

“No, of course you won’t die! We’re going to land on the general line! There you are!”

“What are you talking about? How can we possibly get so far?”

“Well, just think what we shall be making. Power tools.”

The Komsomol members around them clapped Zorin and Blum on the shoulders and burst out as one man: “Good for you, Sancho! Power tools are means of production!”

“What about shorts?”

“And shirts?”

“And chairs?”

Blum’s spirit revived.

“Don’t imagine, comrades, that I don’t know anything about politics,” he said. “And don’t try to pull my leg either. Now take chairs! Of course, if you’re going to sit on a chair and make a declaration of love to your sweetheart then it has no relation at all to production. In fact it becomes an obstacle to production. But what if someone uses the chair to sit on when he’s sewing something isn’t that production then? And what about

the drawing-desks? And the oil-cans? We're not such opportunists as some people think. But all the same we've got to have shirts to our backs."

"Of course we have!"

"What do you call *a* fellow who doesn't have a shirt to his back?"

"A beggar."

"No, worse than that. He's known as a slacker."

The chattering, buzzing, laughing crowd moved out to the porch.

"You're a cunning lot when it comes to talking to an old man like me," Blum said with a wag of his finger, "but you're fond of flowers all the same, aren't you?"

The colonists laughed and hung on to Blum affectionately.

"The important thing is the plan, not the flowers," they insisted. "Flowers have their place in it, but metallurgy has its place too."

Out

The boys began to set up their camping quarters in the middle of May. When the word "camp" began to circulate in the colony it made no special impression. No one took it seriously. It was one thing to talk about a camp, quite another to build it. "Have you got out of your senses?" even the most credulous asked.

However, one day Zakharov told the Commanders' Council quite casually:

"Oh yes, I forgot to mention another little matter we ought to discuss. We've been given twenty tents and—er—"

Zakharov looked up at the commanders. They were holding their breath, so unexpected was the news. He fell silent. It was Nesterenko who filled the gap with a few broken sounds.

"Camp. ... How the devil? Why, it's impossible!"

The tents were a gift from that high-ranking officer who had been so taken with Vanya Galchenko's performance. The tents were old and defective and even needed some patching here and there but... all the same they were fine tents! Several experts in the fourth detachment affirmed that they were officers' tents—a statement readily believed—while there were others, also from the fourth detachment, who tried to make out that they were not tents at all but marquees. But nobody believed that.

A beautiful corner beyond the park was marked out for the camp. It was decided to erect the tents in one line and to draw lots for places in it. Torsky invited the commanders to come up to his desk in order and settle their fate by drawing one of the eleven cards lying there. But Klava Kashirina asked to be heard.

"The fifth and eleventh detachments ask to be given the two end tents," she said.

"What for? Everybody likes to be at the end of the line'."

"Why do they like it?"

"For the same reason as you, I suppose."

"The girls need to have the end tents."

"Why should they?"

“It’s not convenient for them to be surrounded by boys.”

This remark caused displeasure.

“It’s just a whim,” voices were heard. “It’s always the same with the girls, you can trust ‘em to be up to some trick or other!”

“We want those places,” Klava insisted gravely.

Sancho Zorin, who never missed, a Council meeting, now threw himself into the fray.

“I propose that as a matter of principle we do not let them have the end places.”
“What principle is involved?”

“Well, what’s the principle that makes you want the two end tents? The fact is, you’re afraid the boys will bite you.”

“They won’t bite us, but we girls like cleanliness,” “This roused several commanders to indignation. Since when had cleanliness been the monopoly of the girls?

“What do you care about cleanliness?” Klava retorted angrily. “Why, you sleep in the shorts you wear in the shops!”

“How we sleep is our business but you’ll have to draw for your tents!”

“Then we’ll sleep in the dormitories,” Klava said.

“You’ll stay in the dormitories!” someone said menacingly from the benches.

“What do you think? Do you think we’re going to change and so on with all those boys round about?”

“We’re not boys here,” Zyriansky said with a scowl. “We’re colonists and that’s all there is to it! And we’re not going to have any secrecy in this colony. You’ll have to draw lots.”

The girls could not do anything about it and drew. Perhaps they pinned their hopes on the luck of the draw, but it did not favour them. They drew the third and eighth places.

The supply-manager issued each detachment a miserable allotment of spoiled timber. This was for the frames. The boys were furious about it.

“How can you issue it to us like this without any proper reckoning?” they demanded of the supply-manager. “Have you used a clearance gauge? You’ve given us fourteen by fourteen but we need to make the bunks as well.”

“You’ll have to work it out for yourselves.”

“You’re driving us to crime, you know.”

“All right, I’ll take the risk. We’ll see what kind of crime you’ll commit. You won’t steal anything from me, I warn you.”

“Very well then, we’ll only make the frames and we’ll sleep on the ground, which means catching pneumonia and consumption, so it’ll be all the worse for you.”

“I’ll bear it. Do you think consumption’s going to stick to folk like you?”

“We’ll fall ill.”

“All right, I’ll risk it.”

The Commanders' Council ordered every detachment to have its tents ready by May 17. Only the evenings were free for work on the preparation of the camp. As a result, before supper the camping site looked like a market-place, with some two hundred people armed with hatchets, hand-saws and lengths of rope. There was plenty of noise and all kinds of distractions but all the same it did not escape notice that the girls were building their tents on the tenth and eleventh places at the end of the line without anyone hindering them. Notwithstanding his happy disposition, the commander of the ninth detachment Pokhozhai waxed indignant.

"Who gave you the right to put your tents up here?" he asked the girls.

The girls were also busy with carpentry and laughing a lot over it because the work was going far from smoothly. But they had a retort for Pokhozhai.

"You have grown inquisitive, Comrade Pokhozhai. Move on. . . ."

"I'm asking you officially."

"Well then, go and put your official question to the commander on duty."

Pokhozhai wasted no time in finding the commander on duty, who was Rudnev that day.

"How did it happen that the girls got the two end places?"

"Very simply. They changed places with the fourth and eighth detachments."

"Changed with the fourth?"

Pokhozhai ran off to Zyriansky.

"Why did you change places with the girls?"

Zyriansky raised his eyes from the bit of rough wood which was to make a shelf in the tent.

"By mutual agreement."

"What? After all you said in the Council!"

"All I said there was that they ought to draw lots for their places."

"And now you've turned out to be a double-crosser."

"That's not so. I insisted on them drawing lots, and they did. That was to keep them in their place. They give themselves such airs, these girls! Just because they're girls they think they ought to have the end places. It's a matter of principle."

"Well, if that's so why did you change with them?"

"But we agreed to do that on our own accord. I'll change with you if you like. I've got the third place now and you're in the fifth. There's nothing to prevent me changing, whether it's with boys or girls. It's between comrades, after all. You can't call that double-crossing."

Pokhozhai shook his fist at Zyriansky and went off to find out how Nesterenko felt on the matter. Nesterenko saw nothing specially important in Pokhozhai's question and replied to it in his usual deliberative manner; "Huh-huh, of course I swapped places with them. They asked me to. Our fellows didn't like the end place anyway."

"But what about the way you talked at the Council?"

“Don’t be an ass that was something quite different! .There it was a question of equality, don’t you see? But if they want to change, why shouldn’t they? Why, Bratsan’s swapped with Porshnev too. It’s a matter of taste.”

Pokhozhai was very cut up and went off towards the park, scratching his head. Then he smiled and said:

“Maybe the blighters are right after all. Just think of that!”

That evening Zakharov received a visit from Dem, the building technician.

“Those colonists are taking our planks,” Dem said. “Building planks for the camp. Five here, ten there.... It’d do ‘good if you’d tell them it’s wrong of them. I don’t grudge them the planks but we’ve got to account for ‘em. Your colonists are good sorts, you know, but we’ve got to account for the planks all the same.”

The young supply-manager who was present at the interview assumed an exasperated look.

“Blast their souls, get those planks ‘back from them!”

“How can I do that?” Dem purred behind his whiskers. “They’d be offended.”

“Have a look into the matter,” Zakharov ordered the supply-manager.

The supply-manager set off on a punitive expedition and returned victorious with a prisoner.

“Imagine—Zyriansky of all people,” he said. “The other detachments were taking them by the half dozen but he had a whole cart-load!”

“Explain yourself, Zyriansky,” said Zakharov tersely.

“I’ll explain. We’re not stealing. When, we strike camp we’ll return the planks. We’ve written down how many we’ve taken and you can check ‘the number if you like.”

“But why’ve you taken so many?”

“Well, you see, they’re for the fourth and eleventh detachments too.”

“H’m....”

“You know it’s our duty to help the poorest peasantry. The supply-manager issued little enough and though the boys can get hold of some more the girls are too shy.”

“Shy, do you say?”

“Well—er—yes, of course. When it comes to things like that they’re not as advanced as the boys.” Zakharov nodded gravely.

“There’s nothing more to be said on the matter,” he said. “Put it down on paper, Comrade Dem, and I’ll sign for them. We’ll let you have them back, in the autumn.”

On the evening of the 17th, Zakharov and the commander on duty formally took over the camp. Not one tent failed to pass his inspection. The tents were ranged in a straight line, each with a small pennant fluttering over it. The tent of the Commanders’ Council, into which Zakharov also moved, stood a little apart from the rest. Misha Gontar was putting the finishing touches to the electric wiring. The bedtime call had been sounded but nobody wanted to turn in until the lights worked. Zakharov went from tent to tent and found everything to his liking. Then suddenly the lights came on in the tents, the

colonists cheered and rushed to reward Gontar by tossing him high into the air. They would like to have done the same to Zakharov but he held them off with a warning wag of the finger. So it was decided to toss the commanders. All of them went up except Klava and Lida. The girls insisted that they knew how to toss their commanders without the boys' help.

There was a lot of laughter from the girls. Then they shut their tent-flaps, shrieked there in secret, burst out laughing again, screamed insufferably and came out of the tent quite red in the face. The boys of the fourth detachment who stood near that tent for a long while were not able to discover whether the girls had tossed their commanders or not.

"I don't think they did," Filka surmised. "They didn't lift them off the ground, or if they did, they put them down again and ran off."

This hypothesis pleased the whole of the fourth detachment. They calmed down and wandered away to see what was going on in Zakharov's tent. Zakharov was sitting at a desk without his shirt. That was most unusual. The lads took a long look at him and then Kravchuk spoke: "What's the matter with us, Alexei Stepanovich? We don't feel like sleeping."

Zakharov looked up, narrowed his eyes and answered: "It's your nerves. There's a woman's disorder called nerves. You're suffering from it too."

That made the boys think a bit. They quietly left Zakharov's tent and ran off to their own.

"What are you playing around for?" Zyriansky asked them in a tone of displeasure. "What's come over you?"

They hurried under the blankets. Shary lifted his head from his pillow and said:

"It's nerves, Alyosha, a woman's disorder."

"What next, I'd like to know?" snorted Zyriansky. "Women's disorder in the fourth detachment! Go to sleep at once."

He switched off the light. The boys tossed about on their mattresses and looked towards the entrance of the tent. They could see the stars and hear the clanging of trams far away in the town and such a pleasant sound of dogs harking in the village. Vanya imagined Zakharov silting in his breeches and under vest and decided that he liked Zakharov awfully. Then he wondered what nerves were but then he closed his eyes and nerves became jumbled up with the barking of the dogs and somehow everything merged into a sweet, 'breathhtaking, warm feeling of happiness.

7

Igor's Heart Throbs

The school year was drawing to a close. Though their thoughts were always on the strenuous events of the production front, and their muscles ached, the colonists flung themselves into their studies,

Now all school was as spotlessly clean as the dormitories. Carpets in the corridors, Towers everywhere. The teachers went about with solemn faces and spoke in low tones.

Nearly all the colonists enjoyed school work and applied themselves to it with modest earnestness, for everyone understood that only through the school could he reach the real road of life. Several groups of colonists had already finished school and former colonists were to be found as students in a number of towns, receiving supplementary, grants of 50 roubles a month from a special Fund administered by the Commanders' Council. Many ex-colonists had gone on to army and air force colleges.

During the summer holidays and on holidays during term these students and future airmen would visit the colony. The senior colonists met them joyfully as old friends; the younger ones regarded them with astonishment and veneration. And now one of these periodic visits was expected and the colony buzzed with talk about how the guests would be distributed among the detachments. The careers of these older boys were alluring and every colonist felt eager to follow in their footsteps.

It was quite by chance that Igor Chernyavin became so engrossed in his school work. At first his successes were confined to biology, but later he developed a remarkable capacity for literature. A new teacher called Nadezhda Vasilyevna, very young and a member of the Komsomol, told the whole class, after reading one of Igor's compositions: "You've written a most interesting composition, Igor Chernyavin. I recommend you to give it serious thought."

Igor smiled sarcastically: what an idea—to pay attention to his composition! But unconsciously he began to take an interest in literary composition, his own and that of other writers, and to judge it in a new light. He suddenly began to spend so much time over every literary task that even Nesterenko was moved to protest. But over other subjects he was quite at sea until the day when Nadezhda Vasilyevna sat down beside him in the club-room and said: "Why is it you're studying so badly, Chernyavin?"

"Do you mean in literature?" Igor asked with surprise.

"No, your literature's excellent. I mean other subjects."

"You know, I don't find them interesting, Nadezhda Vasilyevna."

"You can't be any good at literature if you're weak in other subjects," the teacher replied, curling her rather full upper lip.

"But what if I become a writer?"

"Nobody has any use for a writer of that sort. What do you think you're going to write about?"

"Oh, lots of things. About life, for instance."

"What do you understand about life?"

"Well, life in general...."

"You mean about love, don't you?"

"Well, what's wrong with writing about love?"

"Nothing. But—er—whose love?"

"Oh, anybody's love. . . ."

"For example. . . ."

"Well—er—someone's in love with somebody else, he's fallen in love, do you see?"

“But who? Who?”

“Oh, just anybody.”

“There’s no such person as just anybody. Every person does something, works somewhere, has his own joys and sorrows. Whose love are you going to describe?”

Igor felt ashamed to talk about love. On the other hand, the problem was a literary one and there was no getting out of facing it....

“I don’t know yet—but—er—does it matter who the person is? Let’s say a teacher falls in love. That can happen, can’t it?”

“Yes, of course it can—a teacher, then. But what kind of teacher?”

“A maths teacher, for instance.”

“I see, maths. Well, how are you going to describe your teacher if you don’t know anything about mathematics? Besides, there are other subjects to write about than love. Life is a very complicated thing and a writer has to know a great deal. If you know nothing except literature you’ll never be able to write a thing.”

“But what about yourself? You only know about literature, don’t you?”

“You are wrong. I even know something about the technology of fibrous substances. Besides which I know a lot about chemistry, I’ve worked in a factory and studied in a technical school. You ought to have an all-round education, Igor, you ought to know everything. Now Gorky knows everything better than any professor.”

Without realizing it Igor drank in all the teacher had to say. She spoke calmly and deliberately and this seemed to give an enhanced charm to the aura of culture -which hung round her words. The next day Igor made a special effort in every subject. He found it quite pleasant and felt his self-respect mounting. He took a firm resolve to study. As a result, when May came around, he was getting excellent marks in all subjects, being rivalled only by Oksana Litovchenko. Somehow he failed to notice the exact moment his character had changed. Sometimes even now he felt the urge to show off and gossip and then it seemed to him he was still the same old Igor, but even so his words sounded different, *more* sensible and clever and humorous in a new sense. One day he addressed himself to Sancho Zorin.

“You know, Sancho, I ought to join the Komsomol. . . Can we have a talk about it?”

“You should have done it long ago,” replied Zorin. “Well, why not? You’ve got over your queer pranks, it seems. We consider you as the next candidate. But how about your—er—political education?”

“Well, it seems to be more or less all right. I’ve considered the matter pretty carefully. I’ll manage all right.”

“I’m, you read the newspapers and you read books. His not as though we have to—er—coach you for either. Let’s go and talk to Mark about it.”

Igor began to show up at Komsomol meetings. At first they bored him. He got the impression that the Komsomol members were discussing matters that were over their heads. Take, for instance, Sadovnichy’s report on the Seventeenth Party Congress! What sort of report could Sadovnichy make if he only knew what he had read in the newspapers? Sadovnichy really did begin rather incoherently, and Igor found himself

noticing me incomplete sentences, the muddled thoughts, the hesitations. But then somehow he stopped noticing these things and began involuntarily to pay attention to the sense. How that happened he had no idea, for Igor too read the newspapers but couldn't for the life of him have summoned up the courage to say what Sadovnichy was now declaiming with such confidence.

"We, of course, didn't know the old days, but we've had to sort out some of the mess they left for us. Tsarist Russia was the most backward of countries but now we the figures of the Seventeenth Party Congress before us. We've completed the Five-Year Plan in four years and have got something to show for it. Have we got Magnitogorsk? We have. Have we got the Kuzbas? We have. And what about the Dnieproges? And the 'Kharkov Tractor Works? They're built, aren't they? Have we got kulaks? No, we haven't! Our fellows know the kulaks well, many of them worked for kulaks in their time, and now the kulaks have been abolished as a class and we are building up a socialist agriculture, based on tractors, not to mention combines, for the first time in the, history of the world. We know what the Trotskyites and the opportunists used to say. Every one of us colonists feels in his bones that if we'd taken their road we'd have come back to where we started from. That would mean that fellows 'like us would go back to working as cowherds for all sorts of swine—er— excuse me, all sorts of petty-bourgeois elements who want to have their own property and shops and go in for profiteering. The First of May Colony will have nothing to do with that sort of provocation. It goes without saying that every colonist wants to get educated, but all the same we shall make electric tools and develop a metal industry. And if that means having to tighten our belts by a few holes, that doesn't matter, if won't do the belts any harm because we are citizens of a great socialist land and we know what's what. Now I'm going to tell you about the decisions of the Seventeenth Party Congress and you'll see right away that everything's being done in our way, not in anybody else's."

As Igor listened he began to see everything in a new light. He understood things even more clearly when he saw that Oksana was sitting in the next row. There was something that touched the heart in the way she listened. Evidently she had forgotten that she was a pretty girl with many admirers. She sat, leaning forward a little, her hands grasping her knees in a way that caused the folds of her dark skirt to gather more cosily. It was pleasant to think of her as a sister and comrade. In this posture Oksana sat gazing steadily at Sadovnichy and drinking in all he 'had to say. It was clear as daylight to Igor that she followed what was being said much better than he did and that she felt its 'significance more deeply. Igor turned his eyes away from her, his brows furrowed. He was overcome by a wish to make a real man of himself. For a long time he paid close and trustful attention to Sadovnichy and at last it dawned on him that the difference between Sadovnichy and himself was that Sadovnichy was a Komsomol member and Igor Chernyavin was not. And then, looking around the hall, he knew that in such company one could travel very far—travel, moreover, in that honest sincere spirit in which Sadovnichy was speaking and Oksana listening.

In his moments of solitude, it often entered Igor's mind that he loved Oksana. He liked to think it was so. He had read many books during his year at the colony and had learned to understand the subtle ways of love. The words "in love" seemed to him too shallow and unworthy to convey his feelings. No, better let it be said simply that Igor loved Oksana. He felt sorry sometimes that this love of his lurked somewhere in his breast and

that the devil himself would not know how to get it out from there and reveal it at its best. He liked the story of Romeo and Juliet and read it twice, pondering on those passages where words of love were spoken. Perhaps, if the occasion should have arisen, Igor would have found even more vivid words, not that he had any wish to die with Oksana in a grave-yard. That side of *Romeo and Juliet* he did not like at all. He found many unforgivably silly things in the behaviour of the principal characters of the tragedy. One thing was certain, they were wretchedly poor organizers! Fancy giving a girl like that a sleeping-draught and then burying her! It was interesting that Sancho Zorin felt the same way about that. After he had read *Romeo and Juliet* at Igor's insistence, he said: "They're queer fish, those people! Take that Friar Laurence—the old devil couldn't even arrange to send someone in time—the messenger wasn't let in, that's blaming it all on the circumstances. Now if he'd known he had to answer for his flop to a general meeting he'd have acted quite differently. And your Romeo's a terrible softy. What the hell? There's a feud and somebody says you can't marry. But if you're in love what does all that matter? You just get married and that's all there is to it!"

Igor looked down his nose at Zorin. As if Zorin knew what it meant to be in love, no, not to be in love, but simply, to love. "Get married and that's all there is to it!" It isn't a question of marriage, for; after all, marriage was not indispensable. Igor had no desire to get married. First, because he had to finish his schooling, and secondly, because he could not even imagine what a hubbub would be caused in the colony if Igor were to go and ask the Commanders' Council to let him.... Ha! It didn't bear thinking about.

Igor told no one of his love, and it may be that Oksana herself did not divine his sentiments. The strange thing was that when Oksana lived with that—er—lawyer, Igor had felt no fear at all in pressing his attentions on her. But from the day she had become a member of the colony he had grown too timid to talk to her even about those African anti-cyclones which she worried over in the biology circle, and with which, incidentally, everybody was quite fed up. Then Oksana joined the Komsomol and her face assumed a new expression, at once self-dependent and calm. Of all the girls she stood out on account of a surprisingly pleasant combination of buoyancy of spirit and quickness of action, and at the same time she created a feeling of gentle and attentive silence around her. She took the floor several times at general meetings and no sooner did she begin to speak than everybody began craning his neck to get a better view of her. She had a way of accompanying her words with swift graceful turns of the head, first towards one, then towards another person in the hall, looking him straight in the eye, smiling faintly, as she went on persuading him, gently driving home her point, all but coaxing him into what she was after. She never failed to make her listener blush and Oksana would switch to another. In this style she spoke one day about the need to help the neighbouring collective farm weed out their potatoes.

"My comrades!" she began. "How can you refuse your help to people who haven't yet learned how to run their own lives? Those people are having a hard time, they haven't yet learned how to work as a collective, while you've got used to it. So how can you not help them? We are strong people, we are the followers of Lenin and Stalin, and I say to you, comrades, we'll go and help them. We'll take the band with us, and it's not only a matter of weeding out a number of rows of potatoes for them but making them see that it's possible to live beautifully and prosperously under socialism. And later on they'll come to us here, perhaps to help us, and perhaps just to dance and have fun with

us. So what I have to say is: there's no point in discussing whether we can be of any help to them or not, dear lads and girls, let's just decide the matter the proper way."

Oksana-spoke beautifully, especially when she broke into an occasional Ukrainian phrase and used the soft "I," and though no one had intended to refuse the help anyway, all felt that it was Oksana who had persuaded them. Then when they were working in the collective-farm fields they all watched her as if she was in charge and enjoyed her keenness. Only the youngsters of the fourth detachment could not refrain from teasing her by going to report to her in "I's" as liquid as any Italian's. The boys looked at her mischievously but were fully ready to welcome Oksana's gentle smile and soft answer, given in pure Ukrainian.

Igor lacked the courage of these gallant young fellows. He occasionally spoke to Oksana about matters concerning lessons or the affairs of the colony, but, unless there was a third person present, he did not allow himself to indulge in *any* witticisms, fearing above all that Oksana should catch him blushing. However, if he found himself in a large group of boys and girls, he exercised his wit to the full. Then he would assure his listeners that Ryzhikov was 'bound to steal the African anti-cyclones, and, what was more, roast them and eat them. There were times when Ryzhikov was himself present to hear such things, and on such occasions he would laugh with the rest as befitted a good comrade. Igor appreciated the attention his comrades paid to him but the real reward he sought for his wit was a smile from Oksana. She always did smile, but Igor knew that it did not mean anything, merely a smile given for the sake of politeness. It was irritating, too, when Oksana, still smiling, would turn to one of her companions with a remark that had nothing to do with Igor's joke. This showed her indifference — Igor's wit was just a pleasant commonplace event, something in the nature of fine weather. Only on one occasion was Oksana really thrilled, and then, though she did not laugh much, she turned on him a look... oh, almost of love. This happened after a general comment on the good looks of the commander on duty, Klyushnev, who had just passed by. Drawing on his recent studies in the 8th form Igor said:

"He looks like d'Anthes, though he does not know Pushkin."

Klyushnev was a fine commander but he 'was. a very indifferent student of literature.

8

The Rest Hour

The school year was over.

"Things are going well," Zakharov told a general meeting... "The factory's going up and the machinery will begin to arrive soon. We're working to plan and the moneys-piling up in the bank. The position in the collective more or less satisfactory, except for that unfortunate affair of the theatre curtain. Now we're going to have a holiday from school work, but we cannot arrange a real holiday this year, for reasons you all understand. All the same, we've got to think about our health. Doctor will now say something on that subject."

What the doctor had to say when he took Zakharov's place at the rostrum nearly made the boys jump out of their skin with surprise. First, he said that the five o'clock tea

ought to be re-introduced; secondly, everybody would have to be medically examined in great detail; thirdly, there were to be some special kinds of baths; fourthly, a rest-hour after dinner, and so on and so forth.

Protests began to shower on the doctor from all sides long before he had finished. Didn't he 'take any interest at all in the new factory? Did he want to throw money away on all kinds of five o'clock teas which nobody had time for, anyway? And what was this new idea—a rest-hour? As if the colony was a sanatorium or a rest-home! Nobody would sleep during that test-hour, anyway. It would mean finishing work at five instead of four, and then having to rush off to tea. Really, could that be called life? Of course the doctor's idea of life was sleeping, having tea and going to the doctor! Why, it wouldn't even be possible to arrange a game of volley-ball if he were to be coddling them all the time.

The doctor's face grew angry as he heard all these objections to his plan. He took the floor once more.

"What an uncivilized 1-1-lot you are!" he stammered. "What the d-d-devil do you mean, talking such n-n-non-sense?"

He produced his evidence. He had obtained all kinds of statistics from somewhere to prove that the abolition of the "first supper" had not effected any saving because exactly the same amount was being consumed now as before. There was so much guzzling at supper-time now that the cook was in complete despair!

"Nothing of the sort!"

"W-what do you m-mean? You a-a-ask Alexei Stepanovich,"

For the first time in their lives the boys saw Zakharov look embarrassed. He glared at the doctor and made a brusque gesture with his arm.

"What are you talking about, Doctor? Of course we're saving something. We're—er—certainly economizing on food!"

"Economizing?" the doctor cried wildly. "I see you we're not saving a rouble. I g-got all the figures from the b-b-book-keeper. Exactly the same a-a-amount. I insist, we must have tea at five o'clock."

Zakharov laughed shortly and sat down with a look on his face which implied that it was a waste of time to argue with the doctor. The colonists dropped the question of "first supper" and concentrated on the rest-hour. It looked as if the doctor had thought up all these tricks just to annoy them. Zyriansky put things best with the words: "Everybody knows how we respect discipline. But tell me, Doctor, how are you going to force me to sleep? Even if I shut my eyes, how are you going to be sure I'm asleep? What if I don't want to go to sleep? No, it won't work, Doctor."

The doctor now changed his approach. He began to use various medical terms, to speak about the human organism and norms of-sleep. And now he had Zakharov's support.

"Listen, you chaps!" said the director. "It's really not decent to object to the rest-hour. We're not so completely uncivilized that we don't understand how necessary it is. It will do us a world of good. You really don't get enough sleep. The 'bedtime' signal goes at ten but it takes you a full hour to get to sleep and some of your bookworms, like Chernyavin, wangle it so that they can read till midnight."

Words of this sort made it awkward for the colonists to reject the proposed rest-hour. They grumbled and looked sore but they voted for it. However there were many disgruntled faces as the colonists left the room.

"When does it start? Tomorrow? Word of honour, what'll they think of next?" they expostulated.

The following day the order was issued making the rest-hour after dinner compulsory. The doctor passed through the dining-hall with a look of pride on his face. Huh! He thinks he's an organizer too. He's organized a rest-hour, of all things!

After dinner Volodya Begunok went through the camp playing the "bedtime" signal. The sun was shining bright, everyone felt full of vim, yet there was Begunok playing "bedtime." They all looked at him with disapproval. But Zakharov went from tent to tent looking so serious that nobody dared to utter a sound.

Zakharov went to his own tent and sat listening. What kind of rest-hour was this with the whole camp humming with noise? People had simply lain down on their beds and started talking. They tried to keep their voices down but nobody could manage it and as for their laughter, it was as loud as ever. Even the girls were whispering loudly and laughing, while from the fourth detachment's tent came so much grunting and wheezing that one might have thought a boxing match was going on in there. Zakharov assailed one of the detachments: "What about that order? Where's your discipline? A rest-hour means a time for sleep. Stop that talk!" His tone was menacing as if he were on the point of setting a punishment task or something similar. It made the most loquacious keep their mouths shut. Zakharov strained his ears. Dead silence. He returned to his tent where he found the commander on duty, Volenko, writing something at the desk.

"In a quarter of an hour you'd better go and take a look round," Zakharov ordered him.

"Very good, Comrade Director!"

"My word, it seems to me we shall have to arrest one of the commanders...."

Volenko did not reply. He shared the general opinion that the rest-hour was a poor idea. Zakharov sat down and went on listening zealously. An astonishing silence had fallen on the camp, a silence even deeper than that of the night. Zakharov too lay down on his camp-bed, stretched out and said, quietly: "Funny people! It's so pleasant to rest yet they do all they can to fight against it."

"It's a pity to lose the time," Volenko said, speaking quietly too.

"Never mind..... They're asleep, you see. That means they needed it."

Volenko let that remarks pass and went out of the tent. The sound of his light steps died out in the universal silence. He was soon back and resumed his place at the desk; a commander on duty always has something to do.

"Are they asleep?" Zakharov enquired.

"Yes."

A few minutes later the doctor looked into the tent.

"You see," he whispered, with a sly wink in the direction of the camp. "I t-told you so ... they're sleeping like 1-1-logs."

Looking highly pleased with himself, the doctor tiptoed along the line of tents. He stood listening for quite a long time outside several of them and came back happy.

“When the organism n-n-needs something ... the o-o-organism itself knows....”

He joined the others and sat down on the camp-bed at the desk, but he did not dare to speak because of the rules of the rest-hour. He just sat and watched the clock's swinging pendulum.

“How the time drags!” whispered Zakharov. “It's another matter when you're working.”

The doctor nodded his assent.

Five minutes before the end of the rest-hour Volenko brought in Begunok. The bugler arrived looking fresh and happy. He could not keep his mischievous eyes off the doctor, but managed to find his bugle quickly enough. Volenko glanced at the clock and said: “Carry on, Volodya!”

Begunok gave his usual salute by waving the bugle and sprang into the open air. The high-pitched flowing reveille shattered the dead silence. But with the first note of the bugle-call something strange happened in the camp, so strange that it brought Zakharov to his feet at once. There arose a terrific hubbub of cheers, applause, bellows of triumph, peals of laughter and many other quite intolerable expressions of jubilation. The girls' voices too could be heard amidst this cacophony. Zakharov looked out of his tent. Even respectable senior colonists were cheering and waving their arms while the small fry were charging about the camp as if they were out of their wits.

“Oh, the rascals!” exclaimed the doctor as the colour rushed to his face. “They weren't s-s-sleeping after all!”

A crowd had soon gathered round the staff tent Begunok, meanwhile, continued “to go along the line sounding the reveille with the most innocent look on his face.

“Now you see how much good it's done you,” said Zakharov as he adjusted his pince-nez. “You've rested, had a good sleep, and now you can set to work with fresh energy.”

The colonists laughed frankly but not a word was heard denying that a sleep after dinner was really very good for the health.

On the following day the rest-hour began without any untoward incident. But only ten minutes had passed before Zakharov caught Vanya Galchenko and Filka Shary involved in a most enthralling game. They were roiling out of the tent from under the back canvas and pinning each other to the ground with all the signs of celebrating a victory, short of words. But though they respected the rest-hour to that extent, they were panting and uttering other sounds expressing threats and jubilation which could be heard all over the camp. Zakharov stood over them with a reproachful look. Shary was the first to perceive the danger. He pulled a serious face and disentangled himself from Vanya. His peeved expression was intended to remove the slightest doubt of his innocence; it conveyed a suggestion that the guilt lay with some vicious force against which Filka Shary was helpless, though he had opposed it from the start.

Vanya made *no* attempt to conceal his fright and stood watching Zakharov's eyes, as he awaited punishment.

“Very clever of you!” Zakharov said to Shary. “Of course you’re going to argue with me about it!”

Shary ignored this broad hint.

“What? You don’t intend to argue?” Zakharov continued, in a whisper.

“What’s the good of arguing?” Shary whispered back. “I’ll come out of it guilty, all the same.”

“I think so too. Look, there’s the sentry. He’s missing his rest. You go and take his place so that he can have a nap.”

Behind the tent stood Semyon Gaidovsky, on sentry-duty with a rifle in his hand under a little wooden shelter in the shape of a mushroom. Shary glanced at him and said, grimly: “Semyon doesn’t want to sleep either.”

“How do you know that?”

“Because nobody does.”

“And you two least of all, I see. Go and replace the sentry till the end of the rest-hour.”

“But there are two of us.”

“Very well, share the time between you. Come on, jump to it! Replace Semyon on sentry-duty.”

Shary and Vanya raised their arms simultaneously and whispered: “Very good, Comrade Director!” Zakharov returned to his tent and once more a sleepy silence reigned over the camp. This time many people really slept. However stubbornly one fights against it, sleep soon comes if one is lying in silence on one’s back.

Vanya went on sentry-duty first. At first it seemed to him that life could be very sweet even if one is standing under a wooden mushroom holding a rifle. But the sleepy silence of the camp, combined with the bright sunshine, soon made Vanya feel bored. Rifle in hand he walked softly to the edge of the camp. Looking to his left he suddenly caught sight of a pair of bare legs protruding from the back of the third tent in the row. He stood stock-still and watched. The legs lay motionless. One might have thought their owner was faithfully observing the rest-hour except for some slight movements of the white canvas tent-wall which indicated that he was up to something in there. A minute later the legs began to wriggle on the grass and there emerged from under the tent-wall first a pair of buttocks wearing shorts, then a naked back and, finally, a ginger head. Ryzhikov—for it was he—looked at Vanya sharply, then his expression changed to one of sleepy indifference and this, in turn, merged into a look of Complete obliviousness as Ryzhikov gazed up towards the sky. But all this time his hands were moving along the ground and pushing their way back into the tent. Vanya grasped his rifle tightly and went up to him.

“Why are you lying here?” he asked in a hushed whisper.

“What’s that to do with you?” Ryzhikov whispered back.

“This is the tenth detachment’s tent. What were you doing in it?”

With a careless gesture Ryzhikov withdrew both hands from under the tent-wall and stretched himself lazily.

“I just like—er—to sleep in the open air,” he said.

“Get away from here,” Vanya ordered.

Ryzhikov suddenly became wide-awake. Blinking his eyes as if he had really just been sleeping, he looked around.

“Well, just look where I’ve rolled to! Fancy that!”

He rose sluggishly and trotted to the first detachment tent, muttering something under his breath and casting his eyes in all directions. Perhaps he was looking for those mysterious forces that had brought him unnoticed to that other tent. Vanya looked after him with astonishment. Then when Ryzhikov was out of sight, Vanya quickly bent down, raised the tent-wall and looked inside. The tenth detachment was asleep to a man. On the ground, right up against the canvas lay a pair of trousers, and next to them a black purse with a small lock.

Vanya dropped the canvas and hastened back to his post thoroughly worried.

9

Angry Old Man

Cares and troubles multiplied in the fourth-detachment, apart from what turned up in day-to-day business, but the boys’ spirits were undaunted. Their feet, however, grew tired by the evening. Filka Shary said it was because they went about barefoot.

The bricklayers had long since finished the walls and had been transferred to other jobs—building a garage, laying beds for the machines to stand on, making a complicated drying-chamber in the big new foundry. Carpenters and roofers were busy on the walls. Dem rushed about the colony; pouring out his complaints to everyone he met.

“The whole job’s being starved, starved to the bone, I tell you. We’re starved of carpenters, starved of cement-workers, we’re even feeling the pinch with our unskilled hands!”

The fourth detachment too had its share of Dem’s confidences, with additional information.

“What’s happened, Comrade Colonists, is that our workers are getting too big for their boots. We’ve got an urgent job on hand here, and off they all go to Turbinstroi! That’s - the only place for us, they say! They all want to go there because... well... they get an issue of work clothes there and so on...”

The fourth detachment could not feel any sympathy for Dem. After all, Turbinstroi.... The very word rang with a vague and splendid solemnity.

“Where’s that?” the youngsters asked him.

Dem’s bushy moustache quivered and his round eyes narrowed as he replied, in an anguished voice: “Oh, it’s the same everywhere. Look, we’ve got to build a cupola furnace. . . .”

“No, not that. Where’s this Turbinstroi?”

Dem saw that he was wasting his time talking to the youngsters. All they could do was to ask him nonsensical questions about Turbinstroi, a place which meant only one thing to Dem: it was robbing him of his labour force. So Dem ran on, leaving the boys still

more excited, for in addition to this Turbinstroi there was now suddenly a cupola furnace to be taken into consideration. This word had flickered before their eyes for some time already as the very essence of metallurgy; they had even encountered it in poetry, but its splendour had always seemed to be that of the unattainable. And here was Dem speaking about it in such an insufferably matter-of-fact way! He had said that they had to have a—cupola furnace!

With every day new machines arrived. They came neatly packed in cases on Pyotr Vorobyov's lorry. Slum, who was usually to be found in some out-of-the-way corner of the premises, was always one of the last to hear of the lorry's arrival. He would come dashing up, waving his arms in alarm and shouting: "What are you doing? What are you up to?"

He would push through the crowd round the lorry and, without waiting for his old heart to ease or his breath to return, would cry: "Down you get off the lorry, come on now! That machine's not one of your goats, it's a Wanderer!"

The lads of the fourth detachment were always first to reach the lorry and they always answered Blum the same way: "We'll unload it, Solomon Davidovich, leave it to us."

Blum would pout his lower lip proudly.

"How can you say such things?" he would retort. "Who's going to let you handle imported equipment? Where have all the older boys got to?"

But by now the older generation is hurrying to the lorry—Nesterenko, Kolos, Porshnev, Sadovnichy. Blum addresses them almost like equals:

"Please give us a hand, Comrade Nesterenko. This is a Wanderer universal milling-machine. Please get all these little fellows away from it."

A twitch of Nesterenko's brow is enough to start all the small fry jumping off the lorry. There is nothing more for them to do but watch patiently as the enormous packing-case is gently slid off the lorry by the strong arms of their seniors. The wide door of the storehouse squeaks open; the boys grasp rollers and crow-bars. Now there is work for all hands, but when the little fellows make a rush for the crow-bars Nesterenko frowns vexedly.

"What's the use of using your hands? Use your stomachs, come on now, shove with your stomachs!"

The boys of the fourth detachment jerk their legs and screw up their faces. The crate, nearly half a ton in weight, is moved just enough for the rollers to be slipped under it.

"How many of you kids go to a kilogram?" Nesterenko asks with a laugh. "About ten, I suppose."

When the packing-case with the machine inside has disappeared into the shades of the storehouse and the storekeeper has given the locks and bolts a good rattle, the fourth detachment hurries off to new business. They argue as they go.

"It's a milling-machine, that!"

"Much you know! It's a universal."

"Universal! That's just the technical name for it. But, really, it's an ordinary milling-machine."

“Ooh! That’s what you say! An ordinary one! There are upright millers and horizontal millers and universal millers!”

“Just look at the fellow! Thinks himself a milling-machine operator! ‘Upright millers!’ Why, I bet you don’t even know what that means!”

“Don’t I, though?”

“Well, come on then, tell us what an upright miller is.”

“An upright machine’s like this, see?”

A grubby finger is stuck under the questioner’s nose. Then it turns in a horizontal position.

“And what’s a universal machine?”

“A universal? Let me see—it’s—er—still some other way....”

“Like this, eh?”

“No, not quite....”

“Or maybe it’s like this?”

“Don’t pretend you know so much. Here am I showing you what a universal is and you waggle your finger about deftly. If you don’t believe me, go and ask Solomon Davidovich.”

However, neither Blum nor the lads of the fourth detachment themselves have any time for that. The arguments about the Wanderer were going on when still more remarkable machines turned up: Cincinnati, Marat, Reineker, Ludwig Loewe, and some very small turning-lathes which Blum referred to as Lerche and Schmidt but which the fourth detachment preferred to call, for the sake of convenience, “Little Schmidt.” And with every new nomenclature came new grounds for argument. Over the grinding-machines they argued for a whole week, so hotly that one evening Zyriansky reprimanded the whole detachment:

“What on earth are you arguing about? You start squabbling first thing in the morning¹ and nobody can make himself heard in that noise.”

“But why does he call it a grinder, as if it’s meant just to put a shine on things? That’s not what a grinding-machine’s for. It’s for getting precision with. The shine comes from something quite different.”

Engineers began to arrive too. They were still more difficult to understand than the machines. Except for one of them—Vorgunov. It was clear from the start that he was the chief engineer. Wearing a rather grim and angry expression he walked with heavy pace past the boys who did not know whether they were expected to say good morning to him or not. He never had a word or a smile for anyone, and from what the ‘boys managed to overhear ‘of his talk with others, he always expressed himself with thunder and lightning. He recently pounced on a stuck-up young engineer called Grigoryev in the middle of the yard and shouted at him:

“Where are those blue-prints, blast you? You said they’d be ready in three days.”

Grigoryev laid a hand over his heart and replied in his squeaky voice: "But we haven't got the measurements of the machine-tools yet, Pyotr Petrovich! It's not my fault if they haven't come."

Vorgunov dropped his massive head, snorted angrily and said, hoarsely:

"This is intolerable! At KMZ they have eighteen of the same machine-tools! You go and take the measurements yourself, right away! And see that those foundations are ready within a week!"

"Pyotr Petrovich," the engineer protested.

"In a week, you hear?"

Vorgunov's last words were spoken in such an angry roar that they frightened not only Grigoryev but the boys too. They looked at Vorgunov with a mixture of trepidation and hostility. The chief engineer looked back at them as if they were bothersome little mites which were getting in his way. According to Torsky there were frequent clashes between Vorgunov and the others in Zakharov's office during the evenings. Blum was involved in these clashes¹. The old man considered the invasion of engineers too extravagant a venture and did not always restrain himself from uttering reproaches. "Oh, how much sweat and toil we've put into saving every kopek we could! And now when everything's ready they come along and puff-puff they open a designing-room and a laboratory with their measuring instruments and their engineers! It's simply terrible how many engineers there are here!" Vorgunov, who listened to these words with an expression of lazy contempt, interjected quietly: "The usual provincial philosophy! Collecting money by kopeks, that's what we are good at! I suppose you kept it in a stocking, eh. Solomon Davidovich?"

"What are you talking about stockings for? You get our money out of the State Bank, don't you?"

"Enough of that talk about your money. I'm not building this factory for you. I'm building it for the state."

"The state's one thing and the colony's another. You're building the factory for the colonists¹, permit me to remind you. And if you don't choose to take any notice of them. . . ."

"Oh, to hell with you! Look, we're in a mess with the machine beds! Yes, Ivan Semyonovich! Where on earth did you find that idiot, that dark-haired fellow? "Did you tell him to mark the steel?"

The young engineer called Ivan Semyonovich Komarov turned a distraught look on Vorgunov.

"Yes, I told him to mark it with grey and yellow paint."

"And as a result he painted the whole lot from one end to the other!"

Komarov grew pale, uttered a cry and hurried out of the office. Vorgunov turned his weary eyes to a thick note-book, suddenly frowned, whispered something fiercely and went out after Komarov.

. "What an angry old man he is!" said Torsky.

“He’s not angry, Victor,” replied Zakharov without looking up from his work. “He’s enthusiastic.” “What’s he enthusiastic about?” “About an ideal”

10

The Hell of a Shindy

Reports from the front continued to be issued daily, and each day Igor Chernyavin found new colourful phrases to laud the colony’s successes. Since Igor joined the Komsomol there appeared such lines as:

“Our Red Banner right flank, fighting for the industrialization of the country and the strengthening of our defences, today dealt a new blow on the retreating enemy. ...

“Comrade Colonists! Our victories on the front are being further consolidated. Today a total of six ‘Red Proletarian’ turning-lathes were delivered to the colony. Our elder comrades made these machines to help us destroy fully our technical backwardness!

“Comrades-in-arms! Have you seen the ‘Samson Werke’ grinding-machines with magnetic bed-plates which arrived yesterday? Our country cannot yet make these machines, but tomorrow we shall make them for ourselves! We must catch up and then overtake! Today electrical instruments are also not being made in the Soviet Union, but tomorrow our colony will be making them. Under the pressure of our forces the enemy — our technical backwardness—retreated today to the line of August 12. With one or two more blows we shall force a deadly breach in the enemy’s ranks—we shall undermine his capitalist industry by liberating our land from the importation of electrical instruments!

“Read the newspapers, colonists! You will learn what victories are being achieved by the working class of our land. Our front is only a tiny sector of the socialist front, but it is highly important to advance on that narrow sector. Today, the carpenters, on the left flank, advanced by a whole twenty-eight days. Long live the carpenters, the glorious fighters in the socialist offensive!”

Although the reports from the front were issued in the name of the emulation staff, every colonist well knew that Igor Chernyavin was the heart and soul of the staff. And the colonists were very pleased with Igor’s work, meeting him with smiles and friendly hellos.

Sometimes Igor pinned up a supplementary sheet, next to the reports, containing portraits and drawings, with an occasional caricature or sketch. The Komsomol bureau, however, looked askance at this work.

“That material ought to be put in the wall newspaper,” it was said. “It goes in the report while the newspaper dwindles. You shouldn’t look at everything from the point of view of your own back garden, you know!”

Igor submitted, though sometimes it was hard not to have his own way. Jean Griffe and Petrov the second of the ninth detachment, and Kruksov of the seventh had always been somewhat stuck-up and now they formed themselves into a small opposition group. Kruksov was its leader, and, for that reason, the colonists referred to the trend as Kruksism. True, the Kniksist worked well and conscientiously on their jobs, but during talk in the evenings they would spread the idea that the colony ought not to be putting up

an electric tool factory. That should be done by the People's Commissariat of Heavy Industry. The colonists had other things to do. Petrov the second, for instance, was interested in the cinema, Jean Griffé in music, Kruksov in sport. Igor Chernyavin sat up all one night with Malenky, and the next morning the report appeared in a magnificent frame.

There was no mention of the Kruksists in the text but there was a very skilfully drawn illumination. Here stood the beautiful city with its towers; a fierce battle was being fought at its very walls; row after row of attackers advanced under a red banner, plunging through the smoke of exploding shells, wielding their bayonets as they charged. Their white collars and the badges they wore on their arms showed clearly that these rows were composed of colonists. Behind them, in an idyllic setting of green shrubs, was seen the baggage-train. It was composed of three people sitting in a cart. One of them held a cinema camera, the second a big trumpet and the third a football. Their faces had been drawn with meticulous care, and nobody had any difficulty in recognizing Petrov the second, Jean Griffé and Kruksov.

As was to be expected the diagram drew a large and highly amused crowd all through the day. Comments, more or less witty, circulated freely and there were some suggestions for further elaborations of the subject. The Kruksist trio raised a vehement protest at the general meeting.

"Who gave Chernyavin the right to put up anything he likes?" said Kruksov. "When was I ever in the baggage-train? I've over-fulfilled the plan for my machine by 30 per cent, and if I sometimes express my opinion on things that's only talk, after all."

"Well, it's for your talk that you're in the picture," Torsky told him. "What else do you think it's for?"

"Oh, I know that, of course," said Kruksov. "But, all the same...."

Kruksov was of the opinion that he had been handled too roughly. But at that meeting both he and others got it still - more roughly. Zyriansky went for them roundly.

"You deserve to be taken off the job for talk like that," he began. "You've no use for the factory! No use, isn't that it? Well, you just add up how many cinemas the working class had before the Revolution, you gawks! How many workers had their own bands or football-fields? Listen to me, you nit-wits! You don't seem to understand who has put these treasures into your hands. If we don't have factories, enormous factories, there won't be a vestige left of all your music and sport! I propose these fellows be taken out of the factory and put to unskilled work. Let them try that!"

Petrov the second was more scared than any of them.

"Comrade's, comrades!" he cried. "Have I ever said anything against the factory? You'll see how I'm going to work! I'll show you!"

Kruksov pleaded guilty and asked that he be forgiven all he had said. Further, he begged the colonists to stop talking about Kruksism. He found it most insulting.

This incident was followed by a sharp rise in Igor Chernyavin's authority among the colonists. He, too, realized for the first time the importance of his task as editor of the operational reports.

Slum's factory was reaching the end of its existence. The "stadium" emerged from the winter with its walls quite blackened. When the wind blew hard they Shuddered and shook. There was no more talk in the mechanical-shop about a general overhaul or, for that matter, about any kind of overhaul. The transmission looked like something off a scrap-heap, held together by rusty couplings and, here and there, by bits of string even. The turning-lathes—the "goats"—were falling to pieces under one's eyes, the tool rests had warped, whilst the damaged chucks wobbled and turned with a bias. But the colonists no longer harassed Slum with their complaints. Sometimes in silence, sometimes laughing they applied first-aid to their collapsing machines and got them running again. During those days the turners' hands acquired a conjuror's dexterity. Even Volonchuk, for all his experience of the *finesse* of production and his insusceptibility to surprise, would now sometimes be found struck dumb before some Petka or other. For four hours on end this Petka would stand at his machine, moving his arms and legs so swiftly that it made you quite dizzy to watch his entire- body vibrating and oscillating.

"The devil only knows how they do it, the bright lads!" Volonchuk would say before he turned away.

Kreutzer looked in at the mechanical-shop during one of his periodic visits to the colony. He stood in the doorway, opened his eyes wide and looked around. What he saw made him open them still wider. Thrusting out his lips he muttered, as if to himself:

"Damn them, just look at what they're doing!" Several faces turned towards him with flashing smiles. Kreutzer proceeded further, looking up. Over his head the pulleys span and jerked, the patched and thousand-times-mended belts flapped and grated above them; the ceiling itself shuddered together with the whole system and shed its last bits of plaster, Kreutzer pointed upwards and asked: "Are you sure it won't come down on our heads?"

His eyes, full of anxiety and surprise, rested on Vanya Galchenko. Vanya drew out a finished oil-can, replaced it with another, gave the driving rod a jerk, and found a moment between jobs to make a movement with his head which meant that the ceiling would not come down. Kreutzer looked around helplessly. Volonchuk ambled up to him.

"Are you sure this won't all collapse?" Volonchuk did not like committing himself to answers without a solid foundation of facts. He too looked up and eyed the overhead transmission. He gazed hard and long, he even moved to get a good side view, he pursed his lips, narrowed his eyes, and only then did he reply:

"Within time it will come down. But it's all right now—it'll hold."

"But what about the ceiling?"

"Oh, the ceiling!" Volonchuk again raised his eyes in a leisurely examination of the ceiling. "The ceiling's a bit weak, of course, but there are no signs that it's going to collapse. That doesn't often happen with ceilings, you know... it'll hold as long as the beams are all right."

"Have you taken a look at the beams lately?" "No. My job's to look after the machinery." Kreutzer transfixed Volonchuk with a look of admiration and let his mouth fall open in surprise: "No, really?" Then Blum arrived and explained to Kreutzer that there would be time to build ten more new factories before the catastrophe occurred, and

that even if it were to happen the beams would not fall right on the heads of the boys but would start by sagging and give a warning in the form of cracks. Kreutzer said nothing to this and went on to the assembly-shop. Here there was no ceiling at all—the work was being done in the yard. Igor Ghernyavin was no longer polishing struts; he had been put on to assembling the trestles for the drawing-desks, the most difficult and highly responsible part of the job. His straight fair hair fell down in disarray, there was dirt on his cheeks, but ‘his mouth kept its humorous twist. He made a grab for the part he needed, took a quick critical look at it, gave it a couple of neat dabs with the glue-brush, a twinkle of an eye and the brush was replaced by a mallet and the wedge of one part had gone into the socket of another. Then came an unexpectedly hard thump by the mallet, and once more Igor had a detail in one hand and the mallet was raised ready to deal another blow. His hands moved to a firm precise rhythm, he scarcely glanced at the oak parts, but suddenly one would go flying off to the scrap-heap and Igor, without interrupting his work, shouted to Shtevel:

“Hey! The dovetailing machine’s again taking half the dowel away! I’ve already thrown out two dozen transversal planks today. What the devil are those fellows doing?”

Igor notices Kreutzer and salutes him. Kreutzer replies with a casual gesture and asks: “How’s the left flank feeling today?”

“We’re ahead of the metal-workers, Mikhail Osipovich!”

“You’ll not keep it up to the end of the year, all the same.”

“Yes, we will! The ‘stadium’ won’t though. Things are going badly for the metal-workers. They won’t keep it up. That new factory’s ‘got to be ‘finished’ earlier.”

“Earlier? What about that three hundred thousand?”

“We’ve now reached the line of August 19. In three months’ time we’ll finish the plan for the year. And according to the plan we’ll have four hundred thousand profits, with some savings on top of that.”

Kreutzer looked at Igor as one practical man at another, reflected a little, looked around gloomily and said with a noticeable sigh:

“Three months... I’m afraid this place won’t last that long.”

“We’ve got the guts. The trouble is the machines haven’t.”

“That’s it. It’s a question of guts.....”

The fourth detachment had another matter on its hands.

Vanya lost no time in telling them about Ryzhikov’s strange behaviour during the rest-hour. The fourth detachment listened to him with bated breath. Zyriansky frowned and pulled at his ears. It was decided to make no fuss about the matter that evening but to look out for further developments. Begunok was the only one to demand immediate action. He turned his sunburnt face towards one boy after another.

““Look out! Isn’t that what we’ve been doing? We’ve seen him tipsy, we’ve shown him the cigarette-box and now we’ve caught him red-handed. But we’ve still got to go on looking out. And in the meantime’ he’ll go on stealing. My opinion is that we ought to raise the matter at tomorrow’s general meeting....”

“Well, what d’you think will happen then?” asked Filka.

“What do you mean, happen?”

“He’ll just say that he fell off to sleep in the open air, and that’s all.”

“But what were his hands doing under the tent-wall?”

“How are you going to prove anything by that? He’ll ask how’s a fellow to know where his hands are when he’s asleep?”

“What about his head then?”

“But how can you prove where his head was?”

“Vanya saw him.”

“Vanya didn’t see anything at all. He saw his legs, he saw his head and he saw the purse—but one thing at a time.”

“And he ought to have seen them all at once?”

“Why, of course! He should have seen -the purse in Ryzhikov’s hands if he wants to prove anything.”

“There’s no need for you fellows to get hot and bothered,” said Zyriansky, “Of course you can’t get up at a general meeting and blurt out that Ryzhikov’s a thief! Why, Vanya might have imagined anything! He may not be a thief at all. He wasn’t caught, was he?”

Not once! Now that time when Ryzhikov himself caught Podvesko that was really something that I can understand. He caught him red-handed and brought him to a general meeting with all the evidence. But what have you got to show? You’ll say you found a cigarette-box. You’ll be laughed at. They’ll ask what you’re up to searching the refuse bins for old boxes. And now Vanya sees Ryzhikov lying asleep and a purse lying in the tent. Well, there are lots of things lying about in tents but that doesn’t mean that anybody who happens to pass by can be called a thief, does it?”

It wasn’t easy to raise any objections to that, and Begunok surrendered.

But another wave of pilfering swept the colony. The thefts were petty ones; it was true, but unpleasant all the same: a watch or a penknife here, a new pair of trousers or a camera there, and so on. All these things disappeared quietly, without the slightest clue being left. In his evening report the commander on duty would inform Zakharov about the losses and Zakharov would accept the report without changing expression or even enquiring about the circumstances. The commanders were equally silent on the matter and in the tents the boys tried not to mention the thefts. But the misfortune that had befallen the colony was never absent from their minds either in the evenings or during daily work. Ever more frequently you would catch the colonists scrutinizing their comrades with fixed intent looks in their eyes. Zakharov no longer joked as often as he used to.

During June tools began to disappear: valuable cutting-tools made of “Pobedit” steel, slide-gauges, dozens of oil-cans, copper ones. Blum took the floor without any warning one day and told the general meeting:

“I have a small matter to raise. It surprises an old fellow like me why such good workers as you are—Soviet people too—talk about all kinds of trifling things at your meetings, without saying a word about these thefts! How can you put up with it? You’re carrying out a real fighting offensive on the front, dear comrades, the right flank is

pushing the enemy back, we're building a new factory and ... just think of it, stealing tools from our own factory! You were always talking about bad cutting-tools, and now we've got good ones they're being pinched. Wasn't Comrade Zorin telling; us that bad machines are the enemy? Well, let's admit they are. But then what are you going to call whoever's stealing the tools? Why don't you say something about those enemies?"

Blum stretched his hands out and looked round the meeting with melancholy eyes: "Perhaps you don't know how hard it is to get a 'Pobedit' cutting-tool?"

"We know," someone said.

The boys' eyes did not rise above Blum's boots, those old-fashioned worn-out boots that bore the dust of all the shops and of all the paths between them.

Blum grew silent, looked once more at the meeting with surprise, shrugged his shoulders and sat down. He wanted to say something to Zakharov but the latter shook his head and averted his eyes. Vitya Torsky also looked down and asked softly: "Does anybody want to speak on that question, comrades?"

Not even an eye was raised in response to the chairman's enquiry. There was a little exchange of whispers between neighbours whilst the girls drew into a close silent bunch and sat quietly with blushing faces. Klava Kashirina darted an angry glance at the girl next to her who was preventing her from listening. Torsky's fingers tapped the reports in front of him as he waited. And just when the suspense had become quite unbearable Igor Chernyavin rose swiftly: "Solomon Davidovich is absolutely right! Why don't we say something?"

"Speak for yourself! Why don't *you* say something?"

"I'm going to!"

"That's good," said Torsky. "Carry on, Chernyavin."

"I don't know who the thief is but I call on Ryzhikov to give an account of himself."

"What are you accusing Ryzhikov of?"

Igor took a step forward, looked confused for a moment, then shook his fist vehemently:

"All right, then. I'm sure I'm right: I accuse him of being the thief!"

The boys went on sitting just as they were before. Not a head was raised towards Chernyavin. Not a sound came from them. Nobody grew excited. There was dead silence. "Where is your evidence?" asked Torsky.

"The fourth detachment can prove it. They know! Why are they keeping it to themselves?"

The fourth detachment, which had taken up its usual place near the bust of Stalin, burst into excited chatter. Begunok lifted his bugle. "Look, I'll speak...." "Go ahead, then."

Now the whole meeting was alive with movement: the fourth detachment was something different than just Chernyavin: the fourth detachment seemed to know something. Begunok rose to his feet, but before he had opened his mouth Zyriansky broke in:

“Torsky! The fourth detachment’s Commander is here!”

“Sorry ... Zyriansky has the floor!”

Zyriansky stood in front of Igor and had some difficulty in starting to speak, but then said firmly:

“Comrade Chernyavin is wrong. The fourth detachment doesn’t ‘know anything-about the matter and has nothing to accuse Ryzhikov of.”

Igor turned pale in desperation. Then he suddenly remembered where he was and summoned up the strength to say in a mocking tone: “It doesn’t look as if Volodya Begunok shared your opinion.”

“Volodya Begunok doesn’t know anything either and holds the same opinion as I do.”

“All the same, let him speak for himself.”

“Just as you like, ask him,” said Zyriansky with a gesture of indifference.

Begunok stood up again but in such confusion that he did not know whether to lay his bugle down on the step or to keep it in his hand. He stood whispering something and staring at the floor.

“Speak up, Begunok,” Torsky encouraged him. “Tell us what you know.”

“I—er—well, Alyosha’s already—er—said—”

“So you don’t know anything.”

“Nothing,” whispered Begunok.

“And what did you intend to say earlier?”

“I was going to say—er—that I didn’t know anything.”

Torsky took a long look at Begunok. The other boys looked at him hard too.

“Sit down,” said Torsky.

Begunok resumed his seat on the steps and went on burning with shame. He had never felt so disgraced since his first day in the colony.

Igor still stood in the same place.

“Haven’t you anything else to say, Chernyavin? If not, you may sit down...”

Igor just caught a hot anxious glance from Oksana; he tightened his lips and shrugged his shoulders.

“All the same, I say ‘that Ryzhikov does all this stealing in the colony,’ he exclaimed. “And I’ll always go on saying that! As for evidence—I’ll produce that later.”

He went back to his place, his ears aflame. Torsky looked very grave but he had not been chairman of the general meeting for over a year for nothing. “We cannot accept a charge like that without any proof,” he said. “You must take it that there has been no accusation made against you on any count, Ryzhikov. As for Chernyavin’s behaviour, we shall consider that in the Komsomol bureau. I declare the general...”

“Let me have the floor!”

This time the meeting turned as one towards the speaker of those words. It was Ryzhikov. He stood erect and calm. The colonist’s bearing had worked a considerable

improvement in his appearance. With an easy gesture he pushed back his hair, which he now wore in a new way.

“Chernyavin is suspicious about me because he knows my past,” he began with restraint. “But he is wrong”. I’ve not stolen a thing in the colony and I never will. He has absolutely no proof. If you want to know who the thief is, take a look in Levitin’s locker. Today Volonchuk missed two monkey-wrenches. As I passed through the mechanical shop I noticed Levitin hiding them. That’s all I have to say.”

Ryzhikov dropped back calmly on the bench. A storm broke out. The meeting dragged on a long time. The wrenches were brought in. They had been found in Levitin’s locker. It was established that they were the two that had disappeared that day from Volonchuk’s bench. Levitin stood in the middle of the room, trembling, crying bitterly, swearing that he had not taken the wrenches. He was in such a state of despair that Zakharov insisted on the interrogation being brought to an end and sent Levitin off to the doctor. He left, accompanied by little Lena Ivanova, the Sanitary Commission monitor and the sounds of his woe were heard all along ‘the corridor, past the sentry, and along the paths through the flower-beds.

“He’s making the hell of a shindy,” Danilo Gorovoy told the assembly, “only it won’t work.”

Gorovoy spoke so rarely that the colony had grown accustomed to the idea that his natural voice was the bottom C he played in the hand. For that reason his brief phrase seemed to express the general opinion. Everybody smiled. Perhaps they felt relieved because one little thief had been found in the colony, or perhaps because that little thief was suffering so keenly that it would be an example to other thieves to see how dearly a fellow had to pay for his crime. There was reason to smile too in the fact that, despite his past, Ryzhikov had now behaved in a very fine noble way. He had not used the opportunity to avenge himself for Chernyavin’s mistake. His reply had been short and had shown respect for his comrade. For the second time he had been the only one to disclose a real weak spot in the collective and he had done so simply, without showing off, like a real comrade.

It was not over the question of how to punish Levitin that the meeting dragged on. Mark Grinhaus put the discussion on to a more serious footing when he said:

“We must make it clear why such people as Levitin who’ve lived in the colony for so long without stealing anything suddenly start doing so. Doesn’t it mean that there’s something wrong with our organization? Why did Levitin steal two monkey-wrenches? What was he going to do with them? Sell them? What could he get for them and where would he sell them? Above all, it’s not just the matter of these two wrenches. Volenko ought to explain why they’ve let Levitin go to pieces like this. He’s the commander of one of the best detachments, with lots of Komsomol members in it. What it amounts to is that Levitin hasn’t been improving here; he’s been changing for the worse. Let’s hear what Volenko has to say on that question.”

Volenko grew very distressed. There was no pleasure for him in Ryzhikov’s innocence, for Levitin was in the first detachment too. Volenko’s face was sad when he rose, all the sadder because it was a handsome strong face which everybody in the

colony admired. He looked so sad that it was painful to look at him. The lads of the fourth detachment looked on with their cheek muscles taut with anguish.

"I just can't understand it, Comrade Colonists," he said. "Ours is a fine detachment, with the best Komsomol members in it. We haven't got a bad lot among us. Nozhik used to play the fool once but he's on the right path now and we haven't a thing against him. As for Levitin, since that trouble he had before, he's changed beyond recognition, you know. He finished school with excellent marks in all subjects, he reads a lot, he's 'become serious and tidy, while Gorokhov will confirm that there's nobody in the machine-shop up to him on the band-saw. I don't understand, I just can't understand why Levitin should turn to stealing. Levitin, don't get upset, tell us quite calmly what's come over you?"

Levitin, who had returned from the doctor, stood near the door, staring fixedly at the gleaming patch of floor in the middle of the room. He did not reply to Volenko. The eyes of the fourth detachment now turned from Volenko on to Levitin. Yes, things had become very complicated for the first detachment.

Torsky waited for Levitin to reply.

"Now keep cool, Levitin," he said quietly. "And speak from where you are."

Levitin raised his head feebly and looked at the chairman through his swelling tears.

"I didn't steal those wrenches," his lips scarcely moved, "I didn't steal anything."

The colonists went on looking at Levitin as he stood at the door thinking hard about something, with his moist eyes again fixed on the middle of the floor. Perhaps he was thinking about the day, not long before, when the "operational report" had said:

"...on our left flank probationer Levitin fulfilled his plan by 200 per cent on the band-saw...."

The colonists looked at Levitin with puzzled disapproval. They were not concerned about the wrenches; why didn't the fellow show more concern for his own worth? Igor Chernyavin's brow was deep in furrows. There were frowns on the faces of all the fourth detachment. Volenko, his elbow on his knee, was biting his lip. Zakharov kept his eyes on the cover of the book in his hand. The boys looked at him expectantly but he said nothing.

When the colonists broke up for bed Zakharov sat by himself thinking, his head in his hands. Begunok sounded the "bedtime" call, put his head round the door and said sadly:

"Good night, Alexei Stepanovich."

"Just a minute, Volodya.... I'd like you to send Levitin to me, hut... do it, please, so that nobody knows about it."

This time Begunok did not raise his hand in his usual casual way but drew himself up and saluted as scrupulously as if he were on parade.

"Very good, Comrade Director!"

Levitin arrived red-eyed and stood submissively in front of the desk.

"Shall I go?" Volodya asked.

"No... I should like you to stay, Volodya."

Begunok shut the door tight and sat on the settee.

"Listen to me, Vsevolod!" Zakharov said to Levitin with a smile. "You didn't take the wrenches and, as a matter of fact, you've never stolen anything anywhere. That I know very well. I have a deep respect for you, a very deep one, and I want to ask you to do something for me. *I* want you to be a strong man. Don't lose heart, I'm telling you. You have been accused which is very painful but... later on, you'll see, everything will come clear, and in the meantime, well... we'll have to be patient. It's all for the better, you understand?"

In Levitin's eyes sparkled something like joy but he had suffered so much that evening that he could no longer control his tears. They flowed freely as he looked at Zakharov with hope and gratitude.

"I understand, Alexei Stepanovich! Thank you... only ... everybody will think I'm a thief..."

"Let them think that! And you mustn't say one word to anyone about what I've told you. Keep it a complete secret between you and me and Volodya. And if you blab to anybody, Volodya, I'll make mincemeat out of you."

Begunok's only reply to this threat was a flash of his teeth. Levitin dried his tears, smiled, saluted and went out. Begunok was just about to say good night again when the door opened silently and Ruslan Gorokhov's ruffled head looked in.

"May I come in, Alexei Stepanovich?" he asked hoarsely.

"Come in."

Ruslan was in a night shirt. His first action after entering the room was to flourish his clenched fist. He apparently meant to follow this gesture with some words but failed to do so. Once more he sawed the air with his fist. But with no more effect again. Then he turned his pimpled face towards the settee and said gruffly: "Tell Volodya to clear out."

"No, let him stay.... Volodya's on our side."

"Can't you see this is all... bunk, Alexei Stepanovich?" Gorokhov's clenched fist now gave emphatic support to his words.

Begunok burst out laughing. Zakharov joined in, leaning back in his chair. Then he extended his hand to the puzzled Gorokhov.

"Shake, Comrade!"

Gorokhov gripped Zakharov's hand between his rough paws and grinned broadly.

"But mind you keep quiet, Ruslan," Zakharov raised a cautionary finger.

"I understand. I won't say a word."

"It's a secret."

"I'll keep it."

"Not a soul must know."

"But— er— what about Volodya? He's— er— such a—"

"Volodya? You don't know him. He's a 'veritable tomb for silence.'"

The tomb on the settee kicked its legs from sheer joy. Ruslan shook his fist again and said:

“Good night, Alexei Stepanovich! It’s bunk, absolute bunk, you know!”

Igor was severely reprimanded by the Komsomol bureau. To begin with he bridled and stuck to his guns grimly but at length was forced to admit that he had acted indiscreetly and that in such cases individual action taken without consulting the bureau and seeking the advice of comrades was impermissible. He agreed to make a statement at the general meeting and did so without any signs of disgust.

“I lost my head and insulted a comrade with an unfounded charge. I ask Ryzhikov to excuse me.”

“It was nothing. I don’t feel insulted,” Ryzhikov answered with a benign smile.

In this way the incident ended more or less happily. Things suddenly ceased disappearing and many were ready to explain this by the fact that Levitin had been caught and had ‘given up stealing. But though the colonists went on with their offensive it was clear to all that the first detachment had sustained a damaging blow from which it would not recover soon.

As for Igor Chernyavin, life soon healed his bruises. He had gained even more respect in the colony, the production front had been pushed forward to the line of September 1, the new factory was under roof already and a start had been made with installing the machines.

On one of the rest-days Igor experienced real happiness. He was sitting on a bench in the park reading a novel and was so engrossed in the book that he would certainly not have noticed who came and sat down beside him had it been anyone else but Oksana. He felt deeply stirred, and joyfully flinging the book on the grass, held his hand out to her. Oksana was dressed in a white holiday frock... but words fail to describe Oksana! Her olive-complexioned cheeks glowed with health, her sunburn was heightened by a shy blush, her eyes had that bluish-gold glitter in them, and that halo of auburn curls.... Igor could hardly catch his breath. Something was fluttering in his heart. He shut his eyes and felt himself rushing headlong—no, not into the abyss but somewhere far up into the sky towards the blazing heat of the sun, anywhere, anywhere.... He suddenly lost all perception of the trees and shrubs and paths around him, of the colony buildings beyond the park, of his friends inside those buildings—everything in the world ceased to exist for him because beside him, sitting on the end of the bench, in her white frock, was Oksana. She was his Juliet and she must now hear him. He would tell her all....

It was Oksana who broke the silence:

“I’m going to town, Igor...”

But Igor did not hear her.

The town ... what was the town to him? ...

“Oksana! Listen to me, Oksana! I love you. I love you terribly! I will love you all my life, do you hear, Oksana, all my life!”

He clenched the fingers of his free hand tightly. He leaned towards her, seeking her eyes. She showed no signs of being frightened or surprised. She just went on sitting in her

white frock at the end of the bench, breathing inaudibly, her lips slightly parted. He could not look into her eyes. He was oblivious of the pain in his twisted fingers, the world rocked about him and every particle of it seemed to sparkle.

Igor's words were so brief and inadequate to express his love for Oksana that he 'felt he must add to them, but Oksana suddenly rose to her feet. He could see that she intended to run away from him but her eyes found time to bestow a look on him. She looked into his eyes.

And now Igor knew where his headlong course was taking him to: he saw a flash of eyelashes opening to reveal shining depths of liquid bluish-gold, and he saw tenderness and gratitude and tears about to melt, and it was there in those eyes that Igor plunged and felt happiness surge over him. For a moment it seemed to him as if all his happiness lay in those words which Oksana spoke in broken tones.

"Oh Igor dear, don't say that, don't say that...."

Oksana buried her face in her hands, turned away quickly and vanished. Whether she ran off or merely slipped out of sight behind the nearby shrubs Igor did not know—her white frock was nowhere to be seen. He stood beside the bench looking down at the book he had dropped.

Before he had time to put his thoughts and feelings in order Igor felt grateful to himself for the declaration of love and to Oksana for that tender glance. Then he raised his head and clenched his teeth: the world had returned to its place around him. The sky was blue and remote, the park, clothed in majesty, stood firmly rooted on the ground and beyond it Igor sensed the buildings of the colony with all his friends within them.

Igor smiled and stooped to pick up the book. His movements were firm and assured. He knew that life had begun for him on that day and that it was a life through which ran paths overhung with blossom. He would travel along those paths with Oksana beside him. They would go together smiling, hand in hand. Romeo? No, nothing of the kind...

That evening after the reporting he met Oksana in the corridor and said, very simply: "Why did you run away? I must talk to you."

Oksana smiled as if they were discussing some book they had read.

"Somehow I felt shy," she said. "That's why I ran away."

They were alone in the corridor. Oksana rested her elbows on the window-sill and looked at Igor mischievously.

"Have you said everything already? Is there nothing more to say?"

Igor put his elbows next to hers. Their shoulders touched. Igor's long mouth had a mocking expression again. When he spoke it was with his old challenging humour.

"You are quite mistaken, Milady. I have enough to say... for the rest of my life."

The bright light shone on the window. Oksana's face grew serious.

"You know, Igor, what I'd like? Tell me now ... once again...."

"I will. I love you, Oksana."

"And what else..."

"I love you terribly."

Oksana, her head between her hands, turned an attentive face towards him. Igor's lips were trembling but his mouth was still set in a smile.

"But, Igor, perhaps it only seems like that to you?"

"No, Oksana, it's what I said. It's for all my life."

Someone ran along the corridor behind them. They looked at each other in silence.

"It's not fair, Milady. I talk all the time and you don't say a word."

"Do you want me to tell you, then?"

"Awfully, Oksana." "Oh, you funny!"

"What's funny about me?"

"Why, don't you understand? It's because I love you deeply. I've loved you for ever so long!"

Igor closed his eyes waiting to hear more. But Oksana said nothing more and when Igor opened his eyes he saw her smiling eyes and her¹ hand, stretched towards him on the window-sill. He took her hand.

"For life, Oksana?"

She nodded. They stood looking deeply into each other's eyes. And with her eyes still on him. Oksana said: "Oh I know what you're thinking of, Igor. You want to kiss me, don't you?"

"I do," whispered Igor.

Oksana nudged him with her shoulder and whispered fervently:

"We mustn't, Igor. You know we mustn't, my darling. If we kiss we'll feel ashamed to live in the colony. It's our own colony, isn't it? The two of us together live here in this colony, you and I. You know kissing isn't allowed in the colony."

"But just once."

Oksana grasped his hand.

"No, no, Igor darling. If we kiss once who knows we wouldn't do it again?"

"All right, I'll kiss your hand."

"Kiss me just here; see, but only once, mind you, only once, Igor...."

There was enough light to show that she was blushing. For a time they stood in silence, looking out of the window. Then Oksana whispered:

"For all our lives, you said. That means we have plenty of time, my dear. Let's study and help the colony to be a fine happy place. All right? Then we'll go to Moscow, won't we? We'll be students, my dearest, we'll go off together to be students. All right? I'll study biology and you what? Literature, perhaps?"

Every time she said "All right," Igor felt a responsive tug of happiness deep within his heart, a feeling that he could find no words to express.

Taking over as commander on duty for the next day at ten in the evening, Volenko, commander of the first detachment, changed the sentries in the camp and in the vestibule, inspected the night-watchmen in the factory yard and near the storehouses, walked along the line of tents to see that everything was in order and locked once again into the main building to see what was on the menu for next day's dinner. As he passed through the vestibule he glanced up at the face of the wall clock and started in surprise. It showed five minutes past ten.

"What's wrong with it?" he asked the sentry.

"It's stopped. Petrov the second's been along and had a look at it. He said he would repair it tomorrow morning."

"Why can't he do it tonight?"

"He took something out of it for welding. . . ."

"What about tomorrow's reveille, then?"

"I don't know."

Volenko reflected and then went to Zakharov's tent.

"We're in trouble, Alexei Stepanovich, the clock's gone wrong."

"Take my watch," Zakharov replied, handing him his pocket-watch.

"But it's a silver one!"

"Well, what about that? Not much of a treasure!" "All the same, it's silver! Thanks."

The next morning was unexpectedly bright and sunny. The boys screwed their eyes at the sun and gulped deep breaths of fresh air. Only later did they discover that because the clock had gone wrong Volenko had woken the colony up half an hour earlier than usual. Volenko appeared to be very upset and had to make an effort to control himself when he met the detachments during the inspection.

"As if it mattered being up half an hour earlier," Nesterenko said to him. "It's not at all bad for the health."

But Volenko did not find the joke funny. After the breakfast signal when the colonists, brimming over with vim and eagerness, dashed into the dining-hall, he went on standing on the porch as if waiting for someone, watching the passers-by with a distracted air. Zyriansky was among the last to arrive from the camp.

"Alyosha, come here for a minute," Volenko beckoned him aside.

They stepped into the flower-garden.

"What's up?"

"The watch... it's disappeared... Alexei's silver one."

"What, has Alexei lost it?"

"No, he lent it me for the night... The clock's stopped."

"You mean it's been stolen?"

"I can't find it anywhere."

"Was it in your pocket?"

“No. It was under my pillow.”

“The devil.... Has everybody gone into the dining-hall? We must make a thorough search right away! Come on!”

Volenko went straight to Zakharov’s desk. Zyriansky waited at the door.

“Somebody has taken your watch from me, Alexei Stepanovich.”

“Who’s taken it? Why?”

“It’s been stolen!” Volenko uttered the hateful words reluctantly.

Zakharov frowned, said nothing for a moment, and turned aside.

“D’you think someone’s played a joke on you?”

“No, it can’t be that. We must have a search.”

Zorin and Ryzhikov came into the office. Ryzhikov burst in and sang out: “Alexei Stepanovich, Zorin’s taking a set of tables into town.... Can I go with him to bring some copper back?”

Zyriansky cut him short.

“Oh, shut up with your copper!” he said with annoyance. “Nobody’s going anywhere.”

“Why not?”

Zakharov stood up.

“We can’t search people. The watch isn’t worth it. Who are we going to search?”

“Everybody!” said Volenko.

“Nonsense. We can’t do that.”

“We must, Alexei Stepanovich!”

Ryzhikov looked round with alarm.

“What’s happened? Something else been stolen?”

“Yes, from me ... Alexei Stepanovich’s watch. . . .”

Zakharov turned to the window and gazed down at the flower-beds thoughtfully.

“If it’s been stolen it won’t be in anybody’s pocket. What’s the good of insulting everybody?”

Zorin stepped forward and cast a furious look at the director.

“That doesn’t matter! Everything will have to be turned inside out! The whole colony! We’ve had enough of this!”

“It’s a stupid idea. Drop it!”

“What’s stupid about it?” shouted Ryzhikov, tossing his head. “What about the watch?”

“The watch wasn’t worth anything.... It’s lost, that’s all there is to it....”

“Stupid? Lost?” Ryzhikov exclaimed, looking at the others angrily. “Oh no, somebody’s pinched it to sell, and later on it’ll be said I took it. I’m always the one who’s suspected! How long do you expect me to stand it?”

Zyriansky opened the door quietly and slipped out of the room. Igor Chernyavin was on sentry-duty that day.

“Stand at the dining-hall door and don’t let anyone leave,” Zyriansky ordered him.

“What for?”

“That’s another matter. Do what I say.”

“You’re not on duty today.”

“Oh, to hell with you!”

Zyriansky hurried back to the office and met Volenko coming out.

“Order Chernyavin to stand at the door.”

“I don’t want to be on duty today.”

“Don’t be stupid.”

“I tell you I don’t want to!”

“Let’s go and see Alexei Stepanovich about it!”

Once again Volenko stood at Zakharov’s desk. Above his white collar his face looked bluish pale, his hair was ruffled, his thin lips ‘moved soundlessly. He stood in silence for a time and then muttered: “Who is to take over my duties, Alexei Stepanovich?”

“Now look here, Volenko....”

“I can’t do it! I just can’t, Alexei Stepanovich!”

Zakharov gave him a careful look, rubbing his knee:

“Very well, then. Let Zyriansky take over!”

Volenko slipped off his arm band and against all rules and traditions, it was put on to adorn the soiled sleeve of Zyriansky’s overall. But, as tradition required, Zakharov rose and straightened his belt, Volenko drew himself up before the director and raised his arm¹:

“Commander on duty Volenko of the first detachment hands over his duties!”

Zyriansky saluted with the same strictness:

“Commander on duty Zyriansky of the fourth detachment takes over his duties!”

No sooner had Zakharov replied to his salute than Zyriansky rushed precipitously out of the office. Now that he was invested with full authority he shouted to the sentry when he was still some distance from him:

“Sentry! Stand at the door and don’t let anybody leave the dining-hall!”

“Very good, Comrade Commander on duty!” replied Chernyavin. He had noticed the badge on Zyriansky’s sleeve.

Zyriansky turned on his heel and dashed back to the office.

“I’m going to start the search, Alexei Stepanovich!”

“I forbid it.”

“H’m, that’s just because it’s your own watch, isn’t it? I’m starting the search, I tell you.”

“Alyosha!”

“I’m responsible, aren’t I?”

Zakharov’s fist was poised over his desk.

“What does this mean, Comrade Zyriansky?”

“It’s essential, Comrade Director!” Zyriansky shouted, confident in his anger and his right to take the responsibility. “Otherwise they’ll suspect Volenko!”

Zakharov hesitated, looked at Volenko on the settee and waved his hand:

“Very well then.”

By now a crowd was jostling at the dining-hall doors. Nesterenko confronted Chernyavin with the fierce demand: “What the devil’s the matter? What’s this ail about, tell me? Who ordered us to be under detention?”

“I don’t know. I’m acting on the commander on duty’s orders.”

“What, Volenko’s?”

“No, Zyriansky’s.”

“Where’s Volenko?”

“I don’t know.”

“Is he under detention?”

“I don’t know. I think he’s refused to be on duty.”

They bombarded Zyriansky with similar questions but he was not one to spend time in talk. He walked into the middle of the dining-hall like the real dictator of the day and lifted a hand.

“Order here!” Then in the complete silence that fell on the hall, he explained: “Comrades! Alexei Stepanovich’s silver watch was stolen from Volenko during the night. Begunok!”

“Here.”

“Go to the shops and say that work will start two hours later today.”

“Very good, Comrade Commander on duty.”

The colonists, quite crushed, looked at the commander on duty in silent despair.

Zyriansky climbed on to a chair. It was clear from the look on his face that only his badge of office restrained him from giving his rage free rein in a burst of angry swearing.

“We’ll have to have a general search! Do you agree? I’ll take a vote. . . .”

“What’s the sense in voting?”

“There’s no need to ask!”

“Get on with it!”

“Don’t waste time!”

“Quiet!” shouted Zyriansky. “Commanders, come over here! The commanders will be searched by the fourth detachment. Get out of the way, the rest of you!”

Though they had all agreed to it the commanders were as embarrassed as the lads of the fourth detachment when the latter rummaged in their pockets, under their belts and inside their boots. But the colonists remained silent as they submitted frowningly to the search; all had to suffer for the one who was still concealed in their midst in this very hall, looking as indignant as any of them—the one who for his own evil ends—and could it be only for money?—was regularly bringing such avalanches of woe down on the heads of the First of May Colony.

The shameful procedure lasted two hours. With grim thoroughness Zyriansky ransacked the dormitories, the stores, school-rooms, and the library. He looked into every chink and cranny of the building inside and out. At “ten o’clock he appeared before Zaikharov, completely exhausted and very angry.

“Not a trace of it anywhere. We shall have to look in the staff’s rooms.”

“We can’t do that,”

“We must!”

“We’ve no right to, don’t you understand?”

“Who has, then?”

“The procurator. Anyway it’d be no use; the watch is far away by now.”

Zyriansky bit his lip. He did not know what to do next.

The colony was silent and unhappy that evening. There was nothing to talk about, nobody, indeed, to talk to, for everyone knew that somewhere in the colony lurked the hateful traitor.

When colonists met they looked into each other’s eyes and turned away sadly. Only rarely did a short conversation spring up here and there, and only to peter out flatly.

“He is in our detachment,” Ryzhikov said to Nozhik.

“Surely,” replied Nozhik. “But who can it be?”

“The devil only knows!”

And in the eighth detachment Misha Gontar said to Zorin:

“But why wasn’t Volenko searched?”

“Don’t be an ass, Misha,” Zorin replied.

“I’m not such an ass as you think. Nobody knew that Volenko had the watch last night.”

“You’re an ass, all the same.”

Gontar did not take offence. In times like those it was not very difficult for a fellow to make an ass of himself.

In the fourth detachment’s tent Volodya Begunok said to Vanya.

“It isn’t Volenko.”

“Who is it then?”

“The owner of that box of Dyubeks.”

“What? Ryzhikov! It can’t be.”

“Why not?”

“Don’t you see? Ryzhikov’s a thief. He steals things for the sake of stealing. But this watch, you know, was stolen by someone for another reason. Yes, for another reason.”

30

Under the Banner

In July the older boys, their schooling over, began to prepare themselves for college entrance examinations. For that reason Nadezhda Vasilyevna gave up her holidays to stay and work with the “students” as the colonists called them, somewhat prematurely. The real students, those who had entered institutes the year before—about thirty in all—moved into the colony in June and put three tents up for themselves at the opposite end of the line to that occupied by the girls. The real students wanted to give a hand in the factory but Zakharov and the Commanders’ Council declined this offer: the students had spent the winter working very hard and needed a rest. Zakharov took a good look at them all and said to some of them:

“No good for anything at all. Bag o’ bones. Call yourself a student! Put him down for extra diet.”

“You’ll never do any saving this way, Alexei Stepanovich!” the students demurred.

“We’ll fatten you up a bit; that’ll be our way of saving.”

But the students found something to do. Some went on monitoring duty, putting on parade uniform for the occasion. Others helped the gardener, or lent Blum a hand in the stores, while several coached the future students who were more than Nadezhda Vasilyevna could manage alone.

Among those who were studying for their entrance exams were Nesterenko and Klava Kashirina. The Komsomol bureau decided to release them both from their duties as commanders so as to give them time to study.

This meant electing new commanders for the fifth and eighth detachments at “a general meeting. And now life turned out to be far less dull than several people thought. The eighth detachment was unanimous in putting forward Igor Chernyavin as its candidate; the fifth detachment was just as solid in its support of Oksana Litovchenko! Igor had never imagined that he stood so close to the high post of commander. When Nesterenko opened the meeting of the eighth detachment by calling for nominations to the post, the entire detachment, as if they had conspired in the matter, turned to Igor.

“We decided the matter long ago,” said Sancho Zorin. “There’s only one for the post—Igor Chernyavin!”

How long ago this had been decided and why Igor knew nothing at all about it was impossible to discover. Igor protested hotly, and he was quite sincere because he was afraid: a commander was always up to his neck in work, while as for being commander on duty for the colony—Oh no, thank you very much! You had only to look at Volenko who had had quite enough of that job and now went around looking like misery itself. Igor mentioned several other names!—Sancho Zorin, Vsevolod Seregin, Boris Yanovsky, not to mention that veteran colonist Misha Gontar, Khariton Savchenko, Danilo Gorovoy.

And what about Alexander Ostapchin who was already the commander's deputy and should in all propriety take over from Nesterenko?

Nesterenko listened calmly to what Igor had to say and as calmly went through the list he had submitted:

"Sancho's too hot-headed to be commander of the eighth; he'd get on everybody's nerves. He'll have to wait a bit. Ostapchin's all right as an assistant, that's true, but he'd always be getting detention if he were a commander. He's always been a blabber, and he'll stay one. Danilo Gorovoy—well, of course he's a tiptop comrade and colonist but by the time he could get a word out the thing would have happened and it'd be too late. Yanovsky would make a good commander if he'd developed a bit more politically, he's weak there. Thinks more about his hair do than anything else. Seredin will make a good commander in time, but he'll have to wait till he's won more authority in the colony. As for Misha Gontar, well, Misha's cut out to be a driver. As soon as he finishes his training-course he'll be put to the wheel. His education is practically over and anyway you can no more expect him to behave like a commander than you can get milk from a billy-goat, though no one could ask for a better man and a finer comrade. Rogov's a milksop. Yes, the detachment's decided right, Igor ought to be commander. We couldn't have a better: he's mastered his work; he's an excellent Komsomol member and is doing a lot of social work. Only look out, Igor, that you keep a steady hand on the detachment. No favourites and don't rely too much on your deputy. A commander ought to keep his spirits up and keep his eyes skinned all the time. He shouldn't be fussy or let his tongue wag too much. He must keep a firm grip on things. Having power is no joking matter, when all's said and done. And it's Soviet power at that. I'll give you an example. One day that French Minister, Herriot came to see us. I was on duty that day. Just think what that meant! I was commander on duty for the colony, but who was I representing? Why, the whole Soviet Union! If I'd made a mistake or done something badly nobody would have said it was my fault, oh no, they'd have said: you see, what a mess they make of things in the Soviet Union. Why, I noticed it myself—there was a whole crowd with that Herriot looking this way and that. Yes, Igor, the power of a commander ought to be a strong power. Especially when you're commander on duty. You just have to forget your real character: maybe you're kind-hearted or mild, or lazy and forgetful. But once you've got that arm band on you've got to forget all that because you're responsible for the colony. Take Volenko! Could you have a kinder-hearted chap? Yet there's no smoking when he's on duty. I myself am Volenko's oldest friend, we came to the colony together, we shared one bed for a year and a half when the colony was hard up, but just listen to this: one day I went up to him and asked him something about dinner and he looked at me—fierce as a dog, and said, in a terrible voice, 'Comrade

Nesterenko, this is no way to speak to the commander on duty! Put your heels together and stop jiggling about! At first I didn't agree but then I saw he was right: quite right, the commander on duty serves the whole colony and that's all! Oh, Volenko, Volenko! Such a fine colonist and he's gone all to pieces, not worth a kopek! Why, you can't call the first a detachment any more! And, you see, Volenko's the one who's really to blame: he trusts everybody, he thinks everybody's good, he defends them all, and it ends up with the ruin of the whole detachment. Of course there's a thief in the detachment but nobody knows who it is, not even Volenko."

Igor's candidature was supported as unanimously in the Komsomol bureau as in the detachment. So at the general meeting the response was confined to applause. Zyriansky alone took the floor: "Such commanders as Nesterenko are, of course, rare, though Rudnev's growing into one of that sort. But Obernyavin's got all it takes to make a commander. The question is how the detachment will act: so that he doesn't let things run to seed or get a swollen head and get lazy, and slack. However, the eighth is an old detachment and will help him out if need be. As for Oksana Litovchenko, she's a real find. I propose we vote for Oksana and Igor!"

Not a hand was raised against either candidate. The commander on duty at once called:

"Under the banner... march! 'Shun! Sal... ute!"

Igor had not noticed that six buglers and four little drummers had been standing near the bust of Stalin for some time. It was they who opened the formal ceremony of saluting the banner before the meeting.

Vanya Galchenko already knew what a really beautiful occasion this was: the salute of the banner was the call to work orchestrated by the conductor Victor Denisovich.

When the banner detachment lined up before the bust of Stalin, Zakharov walked to the banner and Igor realized what he had to do. At his side stood Oksana—yes, at his side! It was a happy omen: standing under the solemn, mysteriously sacred Red Banner they were really beginning their path in life together! And how splendid it was that they should be setting off with the difficult and honourable duty of serving the glorious First of May Colony! Igor was not one to cry and so the tears remained seething in his heart, but Oksana—yes, Oksana had tears in her eyes.... What would you with these women! But then what about commander Nesterenko who went on blinking and blinking and delivered his report to Zakharov in a low husky voice?

"Comrade Director! I have turned over the eighth detachment of the First of May Labour Colony to Igor Chernyavin in perfect order!"

Igor was having none of that! He had more reason to feel moved than Nesterenko yet he would give his report in a loud jubilant voice as befitted a commander. Igor would show everybody how a report to the director ought to be delivered. Speaking in ringing tones, face serious, one hand raised to the level of his forehead Igor exclaimed from his post under the banner: "Comrade Director! I have taken over the eighth detachment of the First of May Labour Colony in perfect order!"

Then the command of the fifth detachment was transferred. They were girls, of course. That accounted for the gentleness in their voices. Klava's was even more silvery than usual. As for Oksana — what warmth and emotion was there! Really, when you came to think of it, these girls were not reporting, they were— well, having a heart-to-heart talk with, the director which would better have been held in his office rather than in this ceremonial hall under the velvet banner in front of two hundred colonists, all serious and rigid at the salute.

The first detachment went on suffering in silence. Someone, perhaps purposely, invented the theory that the watch had not been stolen by a colonist at all but that the sentry had dropped off to sleep in the small hours of the night, and one of the many people who passed through the yard had seized the opportunity to slip into the building. Nobody believed this story, however, the first detachment least of all. The collective spirit of the detachment was broken. Each member found some interest or business to occupy himself with, this one studying for his entrance-exams, that one training for a sports-event. Levitin never left the library. Nozhik spent all his time with the fourth detachment and ended up by applying to the Commanders' Council to be transferred there. It was a difficult matter to discuss, so Torsky merely brought it up in a formal manner, putting a question to Volenko, then to Zyriansky, and on hearing that they had no objections, let Nozhik transfer to the fourth that very evening. The boys of the first detachment turned in to their tent late and crept under their blankets without saying a word. Next morning they faced the inspection in grim formality and returned the commander on duty's morning greeting glumly.

But that went only for the first detachment. For the rest of the colony life continued at full swing, losing none of its joys. In some parts of the new factory the machines had already been placed on their beds; in the huge new foundry a furnace for pig-iron moulding was being installed while the crucible for the copper was already fixed in its brick-lined pit. Many colonists tried out the new places where they hoped to be soon working. The Komsomol bureau held meetings behind closed doors to discuss personnel questions. Vorgunov was said to be pushing his old line that colonists were not fit for work of that kind. The result was that everybody became very angry with Vorgunov. The old engineer never talked to the boys but there was not a colonist who did not know every word he uttered, including those which had nothing to do with the factory.

Several dozen members of the staff lived in the colony—teachers, accountants, foremen, employees and now their number was increased by engineers and technicians. The technical workers' hostel lay at a considerable distance from the park and was rarely visited by the colonists but they knew very well what went on there and were minutely informed about the life of every family with its joys and sorrows, its friendships and squabbles. The colonists had not yet met the two young engineers called Komarov and Grigoryev at work but they had compiled unwritten notes on many aspects of their character and working qualities. Komarov was an earnest fellow, sparing of speech, a great one for work, a man of dignity and honour, but nevertheless a man with a heart who took an interest in the colony and its members. Besides, he had fallen in love with the school-teacher, Nadezhda Vasilyevna. As for Grigoryev the colonists could not be expected to like him. His very appearance somehow aroused suspicion although it was impossible to define anything really unpleasant about it. His clothes had a military cut, which should have found favour with the colonists, yet for some reason it did not. He had not been in the colony for three days before the boys nicknamed him: "Specs, badges, leggings." The name corresponded to the facts, though there was nothing whatsoever shameful about the badges he wore. They were the usual ones— Defence Against Chemical Warfare, International Labour Defence and one with a globe on it which apparently had some connection with Grigoryev's activities. Grigoryev did not like the colonists. Perhaps it was he who turned Vorgunov against them though the latter never had a single good word for him. In the old school building several rooms were arranged

to serve as temporary offices for the management of the new factory. Their windows were always left open and the colonists could often hear Vorgunov going for Grigoryev. To make things worse Grigoryev was also in love with Nadezhda Vasilyevna. The boys did not yet know what the school-teacher's feelings were but they would have preferred her to fall in love with Komarov. Love was far from being a simple business, of course; all flirtation was strictly forbidden in the colony, that everyone knew. According to legend a decision to that effect was taken long ago at a general meeting. Many years had passed since then but everyone well knew that the decision had been made and faithfully observed, which meant that it had to be observed just as faithfully now. This historic decision had not only a practical sense. It shed a certain amount of theoretical light on the whole question of love, some beams of which fell unintentionally on the love of the two engineers.

Unfortunately, none of the events in this sphere of life took precise forms and it was difficult to discuss them. One day Nozhik was on sentry-duty in the vestibule during the early, hours of the morning. That evening, in the fourth detachment's tent, when everyone was in bed except Zyriansky who was finishing his duties as colony commander for the day, Nozhik told the following tale.

"I was on watch when Nadezhda Vasilyevna came and began to read a book and kept asking me whether Solomon Davidovich *had* gone by or not. I told her he hadn't arrived yet but would probably be along soon. She sat down and went on reading and reading. Then Komarov arrived. Good morning, he said. Good morning, she replied. Why he came I've no idea. Then he told Nadezhda Vasilyevna that he had to have a word with her. Had to, mind you. Nadezhda Vasilyevna said, though: 'Please ring up the Western station first and find out when the evening train from Moscow arrives.' He phoned and phoned and she grew more and more impatient. Then he gave up telephoning, sat down on the bench and said again: 'I must talk to you.' 'What about?' she asked, and he said: 'About a certain matter.' Ha-ha, yes, just like that, 'a certain matter!' And then of all people who should come in but Vorgunov. Then Nadezhda Vasilyevna—oh, she's as brave as anything!—says to him straightaway: 'Did you know that the colonists are going on a cultural excursion today, Pyotr Petrovich?' 'And do you know that they've made a hell of a mess with, the placing of the drilling-machines?' he replies, as fierce as he can be, the old devil. But she doesn't get scared at all and just tells him that his drilling-machines are nothing to do with her. 'Well, your namby-pamby outings are nothing to do with me either,' he says. Then he let fly at Komarov. 'There's no need for you to come and talk here about a "certain matter",' he told him, just like that, a 'certain matter,' he said, 'you'd better go straightaway and put things right because that ass'—yes, he said ass—'has gone and installed the drillers on the foundations for the grinding-machines.' He meant Grigoryev by that. And he drags Komarov off before he's had time to talk about that certain matter. No sooner have they gone out when in comes 'Specs, badges and leggings' and makes straight for Nadezhda Vasilyevna. 'Morning, 'Morning,' he says, 'I've got a ticket for you, there's a theatre company coming and I've bought you a ticket.' He says something about 'Fyodor Ivanovich' or something. Just when he was talking about that ticket in comes Vorgunov once more, oh! then we have a bit of real polishing, I can tell you! Grigoryev shifts this way and that but how is he to get out of it?—'Why are you late? Why are the drillers put in the place for the grinders? It's criminal idiocy! The devil take you!' And Grigoryev stands there helpless. Such language

in front of Nadezhda Vasilyevna! 'You oughtn't to use such language before strangers, Pyotr Petrovich!' he says. But all Pyotr Petrovich does is to bawl: 'They can go to hell, for all I care! You're meant to be in the factory and here you are talking to strangers!' So old.

Badges rushes off, you couldn't see him for dust! Vorgunov just got rid of him like that! Then he turns to Nadezhda Vasilyevna and says quite politely: 'Please excuse me, but it's your fault that all the young engineers are going to the dogs. Yes, all because of you.' Well, Nadezhda Vasilyevna looks as if she doesn't understand him. 'Going to the dogs, did you &ay? You can't mean that! What do you want me to do about it?' 'Do about it?' Vorgunov says. 'You ought to know that for yourself!' Nadezhda Vasilyevna says to that: 'I know, I know. I can guess what's needed. They ought to be kept on leads!'" Ouch! (The ouch! came, of course, from the whole of the fourth detachment, legs kicking the air under the blankets.)

"And what happened next?" someone enquired after the ovation had died down.

"Then Vorgunov saw that it was no go, so he sits down next to her, wipes his bald head and says, quite sad-like. 'We Russians do things the wrong way. That's bad. Love and business ought to be kept clearly apart, so you have love here, and business there, do you see, clearly divided.' That's what's the matter, with the Russians, he said. Then he goes on: 'Business is -business but the Russians always mix love up with it and run off to rendezvous so that the business suffers.* He kept lecturing her as if he'd never stop so Nadezhda Vasilyevna promised that in future she wouldn't talk to the engineers -about love but only about -milling and ingots and cupolas."

"Is that all?"

"No. Vorgunov didn't agree to that. He even got a bit offended. There's no need to talk about moulds, not at all, he said. You ought to talk about nightingales and sparrows. Cupola furnaces aren't your business at all, he said. Nothing would please him."

"And that's all?"

"That's all. There was nothing interesting after that. Solomon Davidovich came in and Nadezhda Vasilyevna asked him whether he wanted a ticket for 'Fyodor Ivanovich.' Solomon Davidovich said: 'I don't want any of your tickets; I know already that he killed Prince Dimitri and I don't approve of things like that. What right did he Wave to take and chop that little boy up—a serious man should never do such things as that. Now a factory's another matter.' No, he didn't want a ticket."

The absorbing topic of love came to the colony from another direction too. Driver Vorobyov and Wanda were again to be seen on park benches in touching though silent solitude. Speechlessness, incidentally, was not a usual feature of Wanda's character. She had grown noticeably and become very pretty since her arrival at the colony and would twitter the whole day long all over the place, in the work-shop, the dormitory, the dining-hall. When the colony received a visit from a group of Polish Communists whom the Soviet power had saved from imprisonment in Poland, Wanda begged the bureau to let her organize a supper-party for the guests with the colonists. She made a brilliant success of it. The supper was sumptuous and tasty, the tables spotless and gay with flowers, and the visitors, who were received by the colonists with great warmth, were specially effusive in their thanks to their hostess, Wanda Stadnitskaya.

"I am a Pole," Wanda told them, "and you see how well I live here. Its fine for everybody here—Russians, Ukrainians. Jews.... We have a German here as well, and a Kirghiz, and a Tatar. Do you see what I mean?"

After the visitors had gone Wanda had to console the younger girls—Lyuba, Lena and others. The little girls had made a special fuss over the thinnest of all the visitors, only to discover later that he was not a Pole at all but a member of the local branch of International Labour Defence. They were so upset that they even cried when they got to the dormitories. Wanda consoled them. She explained that you really couldn't judge these things on a basis of thinness. Wanda was popular in the colony both with boys and girls and everyone took it very badly that she was being seen ever more frequently in Vorobyov's company. Zyriansky was on the point of having a word with Vorobyov about it when events took such a serious turn that he had no time even to think on that matter.

At one of the meetings of the Commanders' Council Torsky unfolded a note and said:

"The 'following request has been received: To the Commanders' Council. I ask you to let me go home as my mother in Samara is living in penury and has asked me to return. Volenko."

There was silence in the Council. Heads were bowed. Volenko stood near the door looking gaunt and stern. After a pause Torsky asked, quietly: "Does anyone wish to speak on this question?"

"I should like to ask Volenko a few questions," said Zakharov. "What has happened to your mother?"

"She's—er—very hard up."

"Have you been hearing from her regularly?"

"Yes."

"Were things going better for her before?"

"Yes, they were."

"What's happened now then?"

"Nothing special... but I need to go and see her."

"But you're just about to start your last year at school."

"Never mind ... that'll have to wait."

Volenko spoke dryly, looked only at Zakharov, raising his head merely for the sake of politeness and then setting it drop again.

Silence fell on the room once more. Torsky called for more speakers, but in vain. Nobody had anything to say.

At last Shary's lazy descant was heard:

"Can he produce the letter from his mother?"

Volenko looked at Filka askance.

"What's this? Am I a kid or a new boy? Why should *I* show you my letters?"

"All kinds of things can happen..." Shary began, but Volenko cut him short. A little louder than was necessary, but with complete calm assurance and cold aloofness Volenko said to the Council:

"What do you want from me? I'm asking you to let me go home because I need to go. I have the assent of the Komsomol bureau."

"The bureau raises no objections," confirmed Mark Grinhaus.

Torsky cast another glance round the room. Ilya Rudnev felt moved to pity, probably because of his youth.

"It's strange, all the same," he said. "Why are you itching to go home? Where've you dug this home of yours up from? This is the first we've heard of it...."

Volenko was exerting all his strength to contain his feelings:

"Please take a vote, Torsky!"

"Let me speak!"

"Carry on!"

It was Zyriansky who rose. He had just the right friendly words to say but he avoided Volenko's eyes while he said them.

"What is there to think over? Volenko is a splendid colonist and comrade. We must believe him. If he says he has to go, it means he has to. He can't just chuck up his mother. Let him go, we must release him in a way that a most distinguished colonist deserves: with a full rig-out, suits, linen and¹ the maximum grant from the Commanders' Council fund—five hundred roubles."

And not another sound was uttered in the Council, neither by Zorin nor even by Volenko's old friend Nesterenko.

Torsky became grave.

"I shall put it to the vote," he said, frowning. "Who is in favour of Zyriansky's proposal?"

Every hand went up; but Shary, who had no right to a vote in the Council, said angrily: "Let him produce the letter."

Volenko saluted rapidly, said "thank you" in a low voice and left the room. The Council grew even quieter. Zyriansky laid his hands on his outspread knees and sat looking into a far corner of the room. The muscles around his mouth were twitching just noticeably because he was keeping his teeth firmly clenched. Nesterenko looked down at his feet. Perhaps one of his shoe strings was loose. Rudnev bit his lip. Oksana and Lida Talikova were huddled up in a corner scratching a spot on the upholstery of the bench. Only Chernyavin, the new commander of the eighth, looked around in a rather surprised way. He felt like saying something but, on reflection, saw that there was nothing to be said. That evening Zakharov sent for Volenko. The boy wore that same air of detached politeness. Zakharov seated him on the settee beside him, kept quiet for a while and then said, with a gesture of irritation: "It's no good, Volenko. Where will you go?"

Volenko averted his eyes. The stern formal look gradually faded from his face, his head drooped and he said quietly:

"I'll go somewhere.... The Soviet Union's a big place."

Then he suddenly turned purposefully to Zakharov: "Alexei Stepanovich!"

"Yes! I'm listening."

"It's no good, that's the main thing, Alexei Stepanovich. Do you think I don't understand what's going on? I understand it all. Let them say that maybe I stole the watch myself. Let them say that! I know the older chaps don't believe that... or maybe they do, it's all the same to me. But why, why should it happen in my detachment, this filth? Why? In the first detachment! With so much work to be done in the colony just now! Everywhere, everywhere people are working now! And what happens? Either Levitin, or Ryzhikov, or maybe Volenko, or maybe Gorokhov, or maybe the whole detachment go in for stealing.... And all in my detachment, all of them. Do you think the boys don't notice things, like that? Of course, they do. Everybody does. If I'm on duty they look at me... and think— huh, him on duty and look what's going on in his own detachment! I can't stand it. It means I'm guilty..."

Volenko spoke quietly, forcing out the words, expressing his disgust with every phrase. His frown was hardly noticeable but he was suffering.

"I can't—I just can't stay here. My comrades won't say anything or throw any reproaches at me, of course, because ... they don't know themselves.... But you must understand how I'm feeling. You do, don't you? Don't worry about me, Alexei Stepanovich, there's no need for that. I shan't go to pieces. And maybe I'll now look at life ... differently. No, don't worry...."

Zakharov pressed Volenko's forearm and in silence rose from the settee. He stood by his chair and rubbed his hand along its polished side.

"I'm not worrying about you. It's as it should be. A fellow must know how to answer for himself. You know how. You're acting the right way. Yes, very much the right way. You're a good chap, Volenko. But you mustn't take things to heart so, you really mustn't. There's no need to.... All right, that's all!"

The next day Volenko came to take his leave of Zakharov. He was already in his overcoat and carried a plain wooden case under his arm.

"Good-bye, Alexei Stepanovich, thank you for everything."

"Well, I wish you luck, Volenko. Write to us, don't forget the colony."

Zakharov shook the colonist's hand. Slender and proud as ever Volenko looked Zakharov straight in the eyes and suddenly burst into tears. He turned aside, took out a handkerchief and spent some time in silence pulling himself together. Zakharov, out of respect for the boy's feelings, turned away to the window. Volenko left without more ado. Zakharov caught a last glimpse of the bright wooden box as the boy passed through the door.

Nobody saw him off. He walked along the road alone. But when he reached the beginning of the wood Vanya Galchenko came running headlong after him. He caught him up in the cutting and shouted: "Volenko, Volenko!"

Volenko stopped and looked round with annoyance: "Well, what is it?"

“Listen, Volenko,” Don’t be annoyed. Only listen! Give me your address, the real one, I mean.”

“Who wants to know that?”

“We do, don’t you see, the fourth detachment, all of us! Chernyavin wants it too. And lots of others do.”

“What for?”

“It’s very important! Come on, give it me. You’ll see.”

Volenko looked -at Vanya attentively and said with a faint smile:

“Well, all right.”

He rummaged in his pocket to find something to write the address on. But Vanya exclaimed: “Here! I’ve got everything ready! Write it here!”

Vanya handed him pencil and paper.

A few moments later Volenko walked on through the cutting towards the tram terminus whilst Vanya dashed back to the colony. The fourth detachment was waiting for him in the park.

“Well, did he give it you?”

“Yes. But he’s not going to Samara at all. He’s going to Poltava... and that’s that!”

15

Petty Bourgeois Behaviour

The vestibule was not merely the entrance to the main building of the colony. It was spacious and tidy and adorned not only with flowers but with the sentry in his parade uniform. There were upholstered benches on which it was nice to sit waiting for a friend. There couldn’t be a better place for that because all the colonists’ ways crossed in the vestibule — to Zakharov’s office, the Commanders’ Council, the Komsomol bureau, the dining-hall, the club-rooms and the theatre. On his way to these places everyone would stop ‘in the vestibule, if only for a moment or two, to exchange a few words with whoever happened to be there. There was always something to talk about.

In this casual way Torsky, Zyriansky and Blum gathered in the vestibule one morning. They were joined by driver Vorobyov.

“Good morning,” he said.

Zyriansky replied with a nod and the words that followed were quite devoid of any friendliness:

“Listen, Pyotr, I’ve already spoken to you about it but you don’t appear to care a damn for what I say.”

At that moment the commander of the ninth detachment, Pokhozhai, entered the vestibule. Pokhozhai who was terrifically keen on all kinds of funny stories immediately pounced on Zyriansky’s words.

“Who doesn’t care a damn for what you say?” he enquired. “Pyotr? That’s very interesting!”

"He seems to think I was joking. Why do you hang around that girl?"

"What do you mean, hang around her?" Vorobyov asked, guardedly.

"You're the lorry-driver here. You stick to your lorry! You can turn its wheel as much as you like but you're not here to turn girls' heads. If you go on with it I'll string you up on the clothes-line like a limp shirt." Blum, with wisdom compatible with his age, attempted to reason with Zyriansky: "Listen to me, comrades! Surely you realize they're in love." "Who is in love?" bawled Zyriansky. "Why, Vorobyov and Comrade Wanda, of course. And if they have good hearts and share each other's feelings why shouldn't they be?"

"What are you talking about? 'In love! 'Hearts! That's something new! Then why shouldn't I fall in love, too, and anyone else who feels like it? Wanda needs to finish her studies and here we have this prince gaping at her!"

Zyriansky's views were so convincing that Torsky at last abandoned his neutral position.

"Seriously, Pyotr, you'll land yourself before a general meeting this way."

Faced with this threat Vorobyov paled somewhat but did not surrender: "Queer sort of rules you have, comrades. Wanda's grown-up and a Komsomol member too. Do you consider she has no rights?"

Everything that Vorobyov said or could say aroused Zyriansky's most deep-felt indignation:

"Did you say grown-up? Why, she's a colonist! What do rights have to do with it, indeed?"

Torsky explained the situation to the love-struck lorry-driver more calmly: "You leave the colony and fall in love as many times as you like. This way we'll blow up the whole place on two ticks."

"There'd be no end of these rights advocates here!" said Zyriansky looking at Vorobyov like the wolf at the proverbial lamb.

"But what if the poor girl is in love too," said Blum whose indignation had been mounting as he listened. "You must understand that."

"That's just what they're waiting for, the pests...." Zyriansky said to Blum.

"Pests? Who are pests?"

"These lovers, of course! They're just waiting to be understood. They're pests! Here we are with a factory to build and such a difficult plan to fulfil, not to mention the business with Volenko, and what do they do? Just kiss each other round every corner! Do you kiss her Vorobyov? Tell the truth!"

"Word of honour ..."

"Of course they kiss the devils! And they go on having the cheek to gape at us and expect us to understand them! To feel sorry for them! Because they're in love!"

"But they're right and you know it," said Blum with a laugh. "You know, being in Love is a pretty difficult process for a fellow."

Vorobyov dropped his head sadly.

“So you’d better look out,” Zyriansky warned him again, “otherwise you’ll both be out in the middle, Wanda too.”

Zyriansky ran upstairs.

“You’ll never make it up with them whatever you do, Pyotr,” said Pokhzhai, laying a hand kindly on the lorry-driver’s shoulder. “They’re not human beings, you know, they’re real boa-constrictors. You’d better abduct her.”

“What do you mean?”

“Like they used to do in the past. Abduct her! You know they used to bring the horses up to the back-door and then the beauty would slip out and a lovelorn Petya like you would grab her and flee away.” “And then what happens?” asked Torsky. “And then ... we’ll catch them and box his ears, and take Wanda away from him. It’ll be great fun!”

Blum listened to Pokhzhai’s scheme with a smile: “Why should he use horses for the abduction? That’s old-fashioned. He’s got a lorry. And how are you going to catch him? There’s only one lorry. They’ll be able to drive straight to the registry office! Then they’ll produce their marriage certificate at the general meeting, and what’s ‘more you’ll salute like the nice little boys you are!”

By that time new characters had arrived on the scene and Blum turned to more prosaic matters: “We must put this foolishness aside. Let’s go, Comrade Vorobyov, we have work to do.”

The sequel to this conversation took place a week later. It was a holiday. The entire colony had gone to see “The Loss of the Squadron,” and came back for a late dinner at about five o’clock. The colonists enjoyed the play, besides which it was pleasant to march in their white uniforms through the town with flags flying and the band playing. Zakharov came back in a more cheerful mood and Nadezhda Vasilyevna laughed and joked like a little girl—in every respect it was a splendid holiday. When the boys were dismissed they all ran to the dormitories to change and wash for dinner.

In the vestibule Kiryusha Novak stood at his sentry-post feeling bored and lonely. He loved going to the theatre but had had to miss the day’s excursion because of his sentry-duty. Just then Vorobyov looked into the vestibule, but alarmed by the severe look of Novak’s face turned sadly back to the flower-garden. A minute or two later Vanya Galchenko, already in shorts, dashed out of the vestibule.

“Vanya, be a good boy and come here,” Vorobyov called to him.

“What do you want?” asked Vanya, stopping. “Want me to call Wanda I suppose.”

“Yes, be a sport, please do.”

“Will you give me a ride if I do?”

“Of course I will.”

“All Right, I’ll call Wanda,” Vanya answered at the top of his voice.

“What on earth are you shouting for?”

“Everybody knows all the same, Comrade Vorobyov. I’ll fetch her, I’ll fetch her, don’t you worry!”

Vanya dashed off upstairs leaving Vorobyov examining the flowers.

Wanda appeared. She was wearing a white frock and looking as rosy and beautiful as the situation required. Vorobyov said to her in a melodramatic whisper;

“Do you know what, Wanda?”

For all her beauty Wanda too was apparently suffering agonies of mind.

“I don’t know anything at all! My head’s in a whirl! All the boys are talking about us. I just don’t know where to hide my face.”

Vorobyov clasped his hands and pressed them to his chest.

“Let’s leave in the lorry right away, Wanda!”

“How can we?”

“We’ll drive straight to my home.”

“What an idea, Pyotr!”

“But Wanda, we’ll go to the registry office tomorrow and everything will be fine!”

“But what about the colony? The factory?”

“You don’t really think Zakharov will drop you, do you? Come on, Wanda, let’s go!”

“Oh! What will the boys say?”

“To hell with them! We’ll just drive off! I swear it’ll be all right! The boys themselves put the idea into my head.”

“Not really?”

“On my honour, they did.”

“But they’ll chase us.”

“How can they? They don’t even know where I live. Come on.”

“But look here... how can I? I’ve got my white dress on.”

“It’s just right, Wanda. It’s always the thing to marry in white. Mother will be so pleased, I’ve told her everything already....”

Wanda laid trembling fingers on her hot cheeks.

“D’you know, Petya, that’s right! Oh, I didn’t know you were such a clever chap.”

“You funny. How do you think I became a first-class lorry-driver?”

“What if they see us?”

“But we’ll be in the lorry, Wanda. Nobody will see us there.”

“D’you want to leave straightaway?”

“Straight away!”

“Oh!”

“Come on then. Here’s the lorry. Hop in and... .”

“Wait a moment while ‘I get a few things....”

“All right, I’ll wait. Leave ‘em a note. After ail ... they’re decent chaps, you know.”

“”A note!”

“Yes, of course. Whatever you say they certainly made a beauty out of you. Write something like this: good-bye for the time being and don’t forget me.”

“Yes, I’ll write that.”

Wanda ran indoors leaving Vorobyov among the flowers. He felt himself to be suspended between three points: Wanda whom he had to wait for, the lorry which was waiting for them, and Zyriansky whom he was certainly not waiting for but who might turn up at the most crucial moment.

Meanwhile, close by in the vestibule, the young engineer Ivan Semyonovich Komarov was also being kept waiting. Zyriansky, at any rate, thought so. Appearing at the dining-hall door he enquired: -

“Are you waiting for somebody here? Would you like me to send for somebody?”

Komarov answered to the effect that he was not waiting for anybody and did not want anybody sent for. Sensing uninvited familiarity in Zyriansky’s remarks he turned away sadly towards the open door. Through it he could see Vorobyov enjoying the flowers but this did not attract engineer Komarov’s attention. Zyriansky, on the other hand, saw both Vorobyov and Wanda, whose face appeared for a second on the upper landing, only to disappear immediately.

“Oh, the lovers are already up to their games!” Zyriansky exclaimed indignantly. “They don’t give us a moment’s respite.”

Engineer Komarov blushed deeply but gathered enough strength to say to Zyriansky coldly: “I don’t understand what you mean, Comrade Colonist!”

Absorbed in his investigations Zyriansky replied, somewhat vexedly:

“Lovers, I said. What’s so hard to understand about that?”

The simplicity of Zyriansky’s explanation sent the faintest of shivers running down Komarov’s spine. But Zyriansky had not done.

“If you let them loose, these lovers, life would be impossible,” he continued. “They’ve absolutely got to be caught.”

Difficult to foretell how this conversation would have ended if Nadezhda Vasilyevna had not come into the vestibule. Her colour too had been heightened by the excursion and she too was most suitably robed for the occasion in a white frock.

“Alyosha persecutes all lovers,” she said. “If you ever fall in love, Ivan Semyonovich, take care not to let him see you. He’ll gobble you up.”

Zyriansky smiled sheepishly and said, as he passed into the dining-hall: “Never mind me, fall in love.”

“I was waiting for you,” said Komarov to the school-teacher.

Nadezhda Vasilyevna sat down on the bend: and turned her charming face up towards him:

“What is it you want to see me about? The tool steel perhaps?”

“I beg your pardon?”

“Or perhaps you want my opinion on the installation of the Reineke- his diametric-miller?”

"You're always joking," said the engineer, evidently hinting that there were also serious things in life.

"No, I'm not joking. But I have permission to talk to young engineers only about sparrows, and nightingales."

"Permission? From whom?"

"From your Vee."

"Vee? Excuse me, but who is that?"

"Gogol, in one of his stories of industrial life says: 'Bring in Vee'—that means'—invite the highest specialist. You have a Vee like that."

"Oh, you mean Vorgunov!"

"That's it... well, your Vee ordered me to talk with the young engineers only about various birds."

"He ordered you! Surely not."

"What do you mean, 'surely not'? The reason being that young engineers are apparently highly perishable goods. Terrible, you can only be conveyed by express trains together with other perishable goods like milk and sour cream."

Sentry Novak listened to this conversation with the keenest curiosity. He was specially pleased by the comparison of Vorgunov with Vee, for he had just read the story in which this character figured and found the description highly apt. Novak was imagining with relish how he would tell the fourth detachment of this discovery when a series of events took place which provided a still richer fund of material for passing on to the detachment. Down the stairs ran Wanda with a fair-sized bundle in her hand. Scarcely moving her lips she spoke to Nadezhda Vasilyevna:

"Be a dear, Nadezhda Vasilyevna, give this note to Torsky."

"Where are you off to with that bundle?"

"Oh, I'm going away."

"Where are you going?"

"I'm leaving! For good! I'm quite ashamed to tell you — I'm going to Pyotr."

Wanda gave Nadezhda Vasilyevna a hearty kiss and ran out of the vestibule. Only then did Kiryusha Novak realize what had been happening under his nose.

"Alyosha! Alyosha! Wanda's..." he shouted into the dining-hall at the top of his voice.

Zyriansky rushed out, but the lorry was under way and he saw that it was too late,

"Oh you . . ." he cried. "She's gone, on my word of -honour she's done it! Did she take her things with her?"

"Yes, in a bundle. And she left this note for Torsky."

"A note? Just like in a real novel! What petty-bourgeois behaviour! Oh hell, listen to this! Torsky, I love Petya and am going to him and we're going to get married. I'm grateful to the colonists for everything. Hoping to see you again soon, Wanda."

Commander of the Fifth Detachment

Soon, or perhaps not so soon, August came again, very much the same sort of August as the year before. It was already growing cold at night in the tents but Zakharov also slept out and it was awkward to raise the question of moving indoors in case he should say, as he had done in similar circumstances the year before: "If you're feeling the cold we can have you wrapped up in cotton-wool. That'll make you warmer...."

The previous August had been a happy month and there was every reason that this one would be still happier—except for the problem of the first detachment.

The first detachment! To replace Volenko the first detachment wanted to elect Ryzhikov as their commander! The boys thought they could get away with it without anybody noticing. As if that was possible when this election provided the only topic of conversation in the fourth detachment during the evenings! The small fry were the most talkative. Zyriansky listened to them glumly, wrapped in thought. There was ample food for thought. What on earth was going on among the colonists, what had happened to the Komsomol, why did Zakharov always agree with everything? Why had the first detachment put forward Ryzhikov and the Komsomol bureau confirmed the nomination? And why had Zakharov spoken like that at the general meeting?

"I have no objections to Ryzhikov's candidature," he had said. "I hope that as a commander Ryzhikov will employ his ability even better than at present."

"We all know that the first detachment *is* in a difficult situation," Mark Grinhaus added. "Five of its best Komsomol members are leaving to go on to college and that means five new boys coming in to replace them. It won't be easy to handle them. Ryzhikov has proved to be a go-ahead fellow and we feel sure that he will raise the standard of the detachment to the required level. He's a fine worker and he'll put all his energy into being a commander. We all remember how. He caught Podvesko red-handed and detected Levitin with the wrenches...."

"I never, took the wrenches!" Levitin shouted from his place. "It wasn't me."

Grinhaus paused until he had everybody's attention again and continued: "We know that there are many in the colony who are 'against Ryzhikov, many who cannot forgive him his past. But how many comrades there are among us whose past is, so to say, stained! It would take me a long time to list them all. But now they belong to the Komsomol, they have become students and so on. Of course, this is a question of putting trust in someone. For that reason the bureau is permitting Komsomol members to vote freely. The majority will decide...."

Ryzhikov struts about the colony like a peacock—the famous foundry-worker 'for all to see! Bankovsky, the foreman, can't take a step without him, even trusts him with his wretched drum which is now on its last legs. Ryzhikov is efficient, - Ryzhikov is a jolly fellow, Ryzhikov keeps his eyes open for thieves in the colony. Yet the fourth detachment is not so easily fooled. Perhaps the colonists are too busy, they have their minds full of the new factory and the front and the collapsing machines, not to mention school days, which are now in the offing, and their worries about the love affairs of sundry Petkas and Wandas. The fourth detachment, however, find time to do some hard thinking about Ryzhikov. At the meeting their commander, Zyriansky, rose and said: "On

the question of Ryzhikov's candidature for the post of commander of the first detachment our detachment has authorized Volodya Begunok to speak."

The colonists realized why Begunok and not the commander was going to speak. They all recognized in that the Robespierre touch of Zyriansky himself. Everyone recalled how Begunok had recently wanted to say something on this subject but detachment discipline had suppressed him and how he had sat red with embarrassment on the steps under Stalin's bust, gripping his bugle. Cunning Zyriansky! He wanted everyone to understand that now as before he agreed with Begunok, that the detachment held nothing against him and that it was for diplomatic reasons alone that the fourth detachment was not going to make a real row.

Hence, when Begunok rose to speak the boys smiled knowingly: the doggedness of the fourth detachment was notorious. "The fourth detachment has nothing against colonist Ryzhikov," said Begunok, icily polite as regards Ryzhikov, with subtle undercurrent for the meeting. "We consider, however, that a candidate more worthy of the detachment as well as of the colony could be found. For that reason the fourth detachment will vote against Ryzhikov."

Torsky looked at Begunok with surprise; and the meaning of his look was clear to all. Where could Begunok have learnt such an elegant turn of speech?

"You mean to say that the fourth detachment considers Ryzhikov unworthy of the title of commander?" asked Torsky.

"No," answered Begunok, a faint smile curling his lips. "The fourth detachment thinks nothing of the sort. By no means! He is worthy of it, but somebody should be found who is still more worthy. D'you see?"

Now Begunok smiled broadly in full accord with his diplomatic victory. But Torsky was not to be abated:

"Very well. If that is so why doesn't the fourth detachment suggest its own candidate?"

Who knows, the fourth detachment may have been prepared for this deadly question. At any rate, Begunok did not spend much time in thought before answering it.

"We suggest—er—anyone you like—there are plenty of colonists, take anyone."

"Anyone except Ryzhikov?"

"Yes, we shall vote in favour of anyone else, but we'll vote against Ryzhikov."

The general meeting was delighted by Begunok's wise answers though recognizing that they contained a lot of nonsense too. It was on the nonsense that Torsky concentrated: "I see, so any colonist except Ryzhikov can be a commander, is that it?" he pressed.

Begunok fell silent. He confined his reply to a nod.

"So you could be the commander of the first, or Vanya Galchenko, let us say?"

All eyes lit up. Although the question under discussion was a grave one, the colonists always enjoyed a sharp situation. How was Begunok going to get out of this?

And yet he managed to! True, he let out an undignified giggle, clean forgetting his diplomatic mission, but the words came, loud and even too serious for the occasion.

“I’m not saying that I’d be such a good commander or Vanya Galchenko either, only... we’d be better than Ryzhikov all the same.”

Torsky screwed up his eyes and scratched his head. The colonists laughed.

“Oh, that’s enough of him,” exclaimed Bratsan grimly. “What are you letting the kid put this act on for?”

Begunok heard him and coloured.

“Do you think I’m doing this on my own?” he protested in an aggrieved tone. “The whole fourth detachment thinks the same way.”

The fourth detachment was enjoying itself on the steps below the bust of Stalin. They liked to see their spokesman doing so well! And when Torsky called on those who supported Ryzhikov’s candidature to raise their hands the fourth detachment kept theirs on their knees and looked, at the meeting with scoffing eyes.

“Who’s against?”

Fourteen hands were raised near the bust of Stalin, plus a few more in other parts of the room. These included Igor Chernyavin, Oksana, Shura Myatnikova, Ruslan Gorokhov, Levitin, Ilya Rudnev. . . .

“Twenty-seven against,” Torsky announced. “I don’t quite understand how Chernyavin and Rudnev are voting though. You’re voting differently than your detachments, aren’t you?”

Chernyavin did not reply but Rudnev said calmly:

“Yes, Begunok managed to convince me.”

Rudnev really spoke so earnestly that no one smiled at his words. And although only twenty-seven votes were cast against Ryzhikov the general impression was a bad one. There had never before been an election like it in the colony. When the banner was carried in and the interim commander of the first detachment, Sadovnichy, drew himself up before Zakharov, people felt rather awkward about saluting the transfer of authority.

“Fancy having to salute Ryzhikov!” Filka Shary whispered to Zyriansky.

“It’s not him we’re saluting, it’s the general meeting and the colours,” Zyriansky whispered in reply.

So Ryzhikov .became a commander. A week later he was commander on duty for the colony and Vanya Galchenko, who was on sentry-duty, snapped to attention when Ryzhikov .passed him.

17

You’ve Taught Me How To Live

The Wanda affair ended much more pleasantly. Her flight from the colony was, of course, a severe shock which the note she left did little to mitigate. Worst of all, it encouraged some to philosophize in such terms:

“What’s so terrible in what she did? Why, they fell in love and got married, that’s all!”

This attitude made Zyriansky fume with rage.

“So you think it’s all right? Let’s all get married then! Why not?”

“Don’t be silly, you’ve got to fall in love first.”

“Eh! Fall in love! What’s so difficult about that? You’ll see, in three months the whole colony will be in love. You’ll see.”

“There’s no need to make a mountain out of a molehill, Alyosha,” said Pokhozhaï conciliatorily.. “Besides, not everyone has a lorry. It’d be hard to pull off without a lorry, you know.”

Blum put in a few calming words too: “You don’t understand life, Comrade Zyriansky. Love isn’t handed out on ration cards! It’s not so easy to fall in love, you know. It’s not a question of just strolling out of the house and falling in love. What about a place to live in? What about earning some money? And furniture! Only idiots fall in love without furniture. And from what I see it’ll take you colonists a good time yet before you have the requisite furniture.”

“Aye, it’s all very well to talk but you’ll be abducting a girl from the colony yourself next!”

“How can you say such things, Comrade Zyriansky? Why should I abduct a girl when I’ve got four daughters at home as it is, whom I’d be only too glad to marry off any day?”

As luck would have it, Wanda turned up at the colony on a rest-day when the commander on duty was—Zyriansky. The camp had been struck and the colonists were now back in the dormitories. Wanda walked into the vestibule just after dinner when everybody was either upstairs sitting in the dormitories or in secluded corners of the park. The sentry of the day was Vasya Klyushnev, the boy who, it will be recalled, looked like d’An’thes.

“Hullo, Vasya!” Wanda greeted him, hesitatingly.

“Oh hullo, Wanda!” Klyushnev was delighted.

“I’ve come to see the girls. Can you send someone to tell them?”

“Why, just go straight up. They’re all in the dormitory.”

“Who’s on duty today?”

“Zyriansky.”

Wanda paled and flopped on the bench.

“Oh just my luck!”

“Don’t worry, go up. What can he do to you?”

Just at that moment Zyriansky walked out of the dining-hall with Begunok.

“Oh, it’s you! What brought you here?”

“I had to come,” Wanda spoke with difficulty.

“‘Had to,’ I like that! Ran away from the colony! There can’t be any ‘had to’ about it!”

Two girls came running out of the dining-hall and squealed with delight. Their cries brought others out of the room, Oksana among them.

“Wanda!” she exclaimed amid the inevitable hugging and kissing. “O Wanda dearest!”

Zyriansky pulled himself together and shouted: “I shall put you all under detention! Have you forgotten that she ran away from the colony?”

“No, she didn’t!” retorted Oksana, looking at Zyriansky with astonishment. “What are you talking about? She didn’t run away, she went to get ‘married.’”

Begunok stared and stared and then he too flung his arms round Wanda’s neck: “Wanda dear! Oh how wonderful! You’re married!”

“Leave her alone, you little imp!” the girls shrieked at Begunok.

Zyriansky, however, was not to be ignored. He wore an arm band.

“Order, colonists!” he called in the commander on duty’s usual manner. The girls fell into a confused silence.

“She has no right to be hanging about here. I shall not allow her to go anywhere. She ran away from the colony and that’s the end of the matter. What did she leave for? For love!”

“What do you mean by saying I ran away?” asked Wanda at last. “I’m not a street-waif, am I? I spent a whole year in the colony!”

“A year! All the less reason for leaving it like..like a swine, there’s no other word for ill You’re more interested in Don Juans than in colonists!”

“Don Juans! What do you mean?”

“That Pyotr of yours—he’s a Don Juan.”

“He means Don Quixote,” Begunok put in as an aside.

“He’s no Don Juan at all! We went to the registry office.”

“You had the nerve to go there but not to face the Commanders’ Council! Ran away and turn up only a month later! I forbid you to let her go upstairs, Comrade Klyushnev.”

“Very good, Comrade Commander on duty!” the sentry replied, drawing his rifle to his side.

Zyriansky turned on his heel and went off wrathfully to the dining-hall. Begunok ran to Zakharov’s office.

“He’s a real Herod for cruelty,” said Oksana. “What shall we do now? Won’t you let her by, Vasya?”

“How can you ask such a thing? The commander on duty’s order applies to you as much as it does to me.”

But at that moment Zakharov came along the corridor. The girls ran to meet him.

“Wanda’s here, Alexei Stepanovich, but Zyriansky won’t let her go up to the dormitory!”

Zakharov welcomed Wanda as warmly as had the girls. He gave her a kiss and ruffled her hair.

“What’s all this about?” he asked Zyriansky. “Treating such a welcome visitor like that! You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Alyosha!”

“We have an old tradition not to let people who run away back in the colony,” said Zyriansky from the dining-hall door.

“Run away! What are you talking about? Let her through.”

“Very good, Comrade Director!” Zyriansky replied, frowning and looking officious. “Let her through on the director’s instructions, Comrade Klyushnev.”

Zakharov laughed, shook his head, laid an arm round Wanda’s shoulders and made a waggishly gallant gesture inviting the girls to walk on to his office. There they sat for a long time.

“There were only girls there,” Begunok told the fourth detachment afterwards. “They got-together and acted their own way, you know what I mean. Alexei Stepanovich didn’t say anything... he didn’t scold her, but kept on asking her about everything, whether she liked the house and the old lady there and how Pyotr was getting on. And Wanda answered every question the same way—Pyotr was wonderful and the old lady was wonderful and the house was wonderful. And then, do you know, she went straight up to Alexei Stepanovich and started hugging him, She hugged him and hugged him. She was crying too. Funny! There she was saying that everything’s wonderful and yet she was crying out loud! All the other girls were crying too, it was really funny....”

“What happened then?”

“Then Alexei Stepanovich said to me: ‘Clear out, Volodya, you’re forgetting yourself!’ So I left.”

“But why did he turn you out?”

“I... word of honour, I was simply watching them, nothing more.”

“What was she crying for?”

“As if you can ever tell with them! She kept saying how grateful she was. Then she went into the middle of the room and said loudly: ‘I’ve learnt to live. Thank you for teaching me that!’”

“She’s right there,” said Filka Shary, turning his eyes earnestly to Begunok. “Alexei deserves to be thanked, that’s true. The only thing I don’t understand is why she should cry about it. Saying thank you is one thing, but why the tears? He must have scolded her for something.”

“Nothing of the sort. He was as kind as could be, not the least bit angry.”

That evening the Commanders’ Council met. Vorobyov came to it too and so did a lot of the small fry from the fourth detachment. To everyone’s surprise Vorgunov turned up too. He sat among the colonists on the bench and listened attentively. Torsky gave Wanda the floor. She looked at them all with eyes that conveyed deep feeling, and her voice sounded tearful when she began to speak:

“Dear colonists! I spent only one year with you but I’m telling the truth when I say that I only began to live in that year. All my life I shall remember you. I shall feel grateful to you and to the Soviet power for the rest of my days. Please forgive me for falling in love with Pyotr and not telling you about it. I was afraid to. I felt ashamed.

Forgive Pyotr too. He's just like a colonist himself. Please let me leave the colony the proper way, honourably, and let me work at the new factory, maybe as a turner or in some other job."

Then Vorobyov spoke, though rather falteringly and blushing all the time as his eyes fell on Zyriansky:

"I'm—er—not much of a speaker! It's the man that matters, not the words. Don't you worry. I understand and I'm not taking offence. It's a good thing you have such strict rules here, that 'I understand. That's why Wanda is such a fine sort...."

"You like her, do you?" asked Zyriansky,

"Of course I do. I love Wanda, I tell you straight. And don't you worry; I'll go on loving her all my life...."

"How wonderful!" whispered Oksana, her lips pressed to Lida Talfkova's ear. Lida's nod was full of understanding.

But Zyriansky insisted on having his say.

"Wanda and Pyotr did not behave properly. Perhaps they will really be true to each other for the rest of their lives, but who is to know that? There are others who might like to be together for only a short time, how are we to know about that? We can't allow either one or the other. What'll happen to our discipline if we let lovers of all sorts act the way they want? You should have stated your case to the Commanders' Council, and then we'd have considered it and elected a commission to look into the matter thoroughly. But you just took the matter into your own hands, jumped into a lorry and rode away. It's true that's the way it was done in days gone by. I propose that for getting married without..."

It was at this point that Vorgunov spoke to the colonists for the first time: "Without a parents' blessing."

Not only Zyriansky but all the colonists reeled under this unexpected onslaught. Everyone looked at Vorgunov who went on sitting there among them, impassive, huge, apparently displeased as he looked straight at Zyriansky.

"That's what I say," Vorgunov continued. "Without the blessing of your—er—Commanders' Council what's the difference? For things like that parents used to curse their children."

Zyriansky cheered up when he heard Vorgunov speaking just like any other human being.

"We're not going to curse them," he said, "but I propose that Wanda and Pyotr get ten hours detention."

"That's right!" Shary called from a distant corner.

Vorgunov's eyes sought out Shary. Turning his heavy body in his direction, he said: "Tell me, you who shouted 'that's right,' what do you know about it?" "Isn't it clear?"

"Not to me."

"What do you expect?" Shary said in the deepest tones he could manage. "You're still quite a newcomer to the colony."

And then the colonists saw that Vorgunov knew how to laugh. And what a laugh—a full-throated bass laugh that set his shoulders as well as his belly shaking. Then he addressed Shary again, stern now:

‘And d’you think I’d become as blood-thirsty as Zyriansky if I stayed in the colony longer?’

“Of course you would if you lived with us. ... But perhaps you’d run away before that happened.”

Vorgunov gave another roar of laughter. He liked Shary. The colonists were jubilant; it was good to know that at last that outsider of a chief engineer had spoken and even laughed.

The Commanders’ Council closed on a gay note. True, Zyriansky did not withdraw his proposal but it only got two votes, one of them, moreover, being Shary’s which didn’t count because he wasn’t a commander. The Council decided to give Wanda an honourable discharge, to present her with a dowry— they elected a commission to choose it—and to let her go on working as a turner. Further, the entire Council would visit the Vorobyovs on the next rest-day to see how they were living and, if need be, to give them a hand. Wanda left the meeting in rapture, so closely surrounded by the girls that she clean forgot her Pyotr.

, That evening Wanda dropped in to say good-bye to the fourth detachment. Zyriansky greeted her affably, beckoned her to a chair and said:

“I hope you aren’t angry with me?”

“Oh you dear boys, it’s so hard to leave you I’ve no time to feel angry. Live well and don’t forget me. And thank you for being my comrades, thank you!”

Begunok listened to Wanda with serious attention while managing to keep Shary under observation. He noticed a suspicious glitter in Shary’s eyes and was ready to make fun of him. But Shary frowned and said, rather portentously, in the most unemotional everyday voice: “We—er—why, of course, we shall go on being good comrades. There’s no need for you to worry about that, Wanda. Why are you crying? This is no time for tears.”

Wanda dried her tears, smiled and made a grab for Vanya Galchenko. She smothered him with kisses in front of them all. Vanya looked at her with startled eyes. Then he pulled himself together: “Why am I the one to get all the kisses? You’d better say good-bye to all of us.”

This remark caused a tremendous racket in the detachment as everyone made a dash to be kissed. Then they all shook Wanda’s hand.

“Come and see -us.... Just like that. . . . Mind you come to our detachment.”

Wanda had now stopped crying and she was smiling as she promised to come back. Perhaps she cried again elsewhere but that the fourth detachment did not see. They bade their farewells in a merry mood and, of course, not one of them even thought of shedding a tear.

Flags on the Battlement

The factory building was finished and, as is always the case, this was just the time when so much work had accumulated that there seemed to be no possibility of ever getting through it. Some of the machines already stood on their beds, others kept arriving before the beds were ready for them. Hard as they tried the colonists could not keep their yard from becoming chaotically untidy. The new buildings were still in scaffolding,, everywhere stood temporary huts and sheds, scraps of board, piles of rubble and broken bricks. Lime-pits gaped, broken hods lay scattered about among sheets of plywood and bast mats, all covered with the building dust from which there was no escape even in the main building. And beside the new factory emerging out of chaos, the old Blum enterprise lay a-dying. It too lay in the midst of chaos —only that was the chaos of decline.

By the end of August the colonists had pushed their front up to the line of November 1, which was the colony average. On the right flank the girls were “pressing after the panic-stricken enemy” on the lines of the last week in December, but all the same—the Blum factory was dying. One by one the old turning-lathes—the “goats”—fell out of commission and’ things went no better in the machine department of the carpenter-shop. The “stadium” with its avalanches of scrap, spoiled parts and mass of rubbish presented so revolting a sight that Zakharov put his Foot down and forbade the workers to return there when the cold weather set in. On more than one occasion fires broke out in the “stadium.” No one knew what caused them but they were easily put out. The charred patches they left made the place seem even more depressing than ever.

“I can stand anything,” Blum protested to the boys. “I can stand industrial deficiencies, I can sit and the new factory, but I cannot stand fires on top of all that. How can you expect .my old heart to take that extra strain? Why should it?”

“The ‘stadium’ is going to be burnt down anyway,” the boys consoled him. “You know it’s going to be burnt, don’t you, Solomon Davidovich?”

“How do you know so well what’s going to happen to it?”

“Why, the whole colony says so.”

“I like that! Hasn’t the colony anything else to say?”

“About the ‘stadium’? What else do you expect them to say about it? Why, it’s part of the Old World, Solomon Davidovich. We’ve got to make a bonfire of it whatever you say.”

Blum was offended and alarmed. He had got into the habit of going to Zakharov’s office of an evening and dozing on the settee.

“Why don’t you go to bed, Solomon Davidovich?” Zakharov once asked him.

“Something else turned up, damn it!”

“What is it?”

“Well, it sounds funny, but I’m expecting a fire.”

“Where? In the ‘stadium’?”

“Where else?”

“But what makes you think the fire will break out while you’re awake? It could start in the early morning, couldn’t it?”

“That’d be quite another matter. Then nobody could say that the ‘stadium’ caught fire and I’d gone to bed early. Say I go to bed at midnight, do you think that would look all right?”

“Yes, that would look all right.”

“Very well, I’ll sit here till midnight.”

Towards the end of August, Kreutzer arrived. After making a quick tour of Blum’s work-shops he went to Zakharov.

“Tell that Volodya of yours to summon the Commanders’ Council.”

“What, during working hours?”

“That doesn’t matter. I propose an immediate cessation of work. Do you think they can really go on working in that mechanical-shop or in the ‘stadium’?”

“I agree it’s quite impossible.”

“Then let’s have a Council meeting.”

“All right, let’s.”

To the astonishment of the commanders and all the colony the signal summoning a Commanders’ Council was heard at a time when work was at its height. It entered nobody’s head that this short three-note bugle-call was the last blow dealt at Blum’s old factory.

The meeting did not take long. Kreutzer suggested that the colony should put all its force into construction work so as to get the new factory ready more quickly and put it into commission. The colonists greeted the proposal with an ovation. Vorgunov who had listened, to both the suggestion and the reaction to it with distrust and alarm, looked at the boys and put only one question:

“Are they going to dismantle the scaffolding too?”

The commanders looked at him vacantly, not grasping what he meant, while Vorgunov returned their glances without understanding why they were puzzled. Blum pouted censoriously: “Huh! Dismantle scaffolding! If you asked them to dismantle the devil himself they’d do it and stack every part of him in order: the paws and hooves separately, the horns on the left, the tail on the right. You needn’t worry about your inventory.”

Vorgunov turned his face towards Blum and spoke sarcastically.

“I’ve never had to dismantle the devil but I’m sure it’s an easier job than taking down scaffolding.”

“That’s where you’re wrong. Do you think the devil would sit quiet and look on while he was being dismantled. He’d be snapping with all his teeth!”

This curious argument was stopped by Zakharov.

“Both Solomon Davidovich and Pyotr were out-of-date with their problem. We’ll take care of the scaffolding, Pyotr Petrovich.

Vorgunov shifted his body in a way that signified that; he still had some doubts about the way the colonists would handle the scaffolding.

Next day the crowds were-unusually large in front of the diagram in the vestibule. The operational report ran:

“Situation on the Front on August 29

“Yesterday our Red Banner right flank dealt its last blow on the enemy: the girls of the dressmaking-shop completely fulfilled the annual plan by capturing the right tower of the city after a short charge. The U.S.S.R. flag has been hoisted on the battlements.

“Abandoning all hope of victory the enemy has’ started to evacuate the city. It is to be hoped that though tomorrow is a rest-day, our left flank and centre units will use it to enter the city too!”

On the diagram a red flag was clearly to be seen floating from the battlements on the right side of the city. This event had been so long awaited that it was hard to believe one’s eyes when it actually happened. Throughout the day the fourth detachment went to ‘gaze at the diagram in order to convince themselves that the small narrow red flag with the letters U.S.S.R. on it was really flying from the battlements’. Besides that they could see the enemy fleeing from the city. Their opponents were not blue after all, but black, tiny and somewhat disgusting. Malenky had drawn them with Indian ink and had apparently spent a good deal of time on the job for they were very numerous.

The order of the day was read out during supper. It said briefly:

“The fifth and eleventh detachments will present themselves at the general meeting in parade order. The band and the banner detachment will report to the commander on duty.”

The celebration took place at the general meeting that evening. The girls came in wearing parade uniform; they were given musical honours and then thanked and congratulated. Of course, the girls did not have to deal with “goats” and poor-quality timber like the boys but all the same nobody could deny that they had done a nice piece of work, and so there was not a boy to be found who grudged them their triumph—on the contrary, everybody was delighted and looked at the girls with shining eyes.

Oksana Litovchenko replied to the congratulations. Igor listened to her speech with pride. He felt proud that he alone loved Oksana that only he knew what a wonderful girl she was! Nobody else could ‘have spoken so well as Oksana:

“This is what I have to say to you, my dear comrades! Who could ever think that the girls would come into this beautiful room and be met by forty lads playing trumpets in their honour? And all these lads who played and stood under our banner, all of them together with us and Solomon Davidovich and the new chief engineer Pyotr Petrovich and the others, especially Alexei Stepanovich, and those who aren’t here now but are working, like our teachers and foremen and workers—all of us have heard ‘as one what our Bolshevik Party has told us, what Lenin has said to us and what Stalin is saying to us every day. We listened and we worked like heroes, not like hired hands, and made thousands, hundreds of thousands of tables and chairs and oil-cans and drawing-desks

and pairs of shorts and sports shirts. We made those things and sent them to the people to make use of. And see how now we have won for ourselves and our country a new factory, a real Stalin's factory, where we are going to make tools for the Red Army—and remember the Red Army needs tools as well as bullets to beat the enemy. And not only for the Red Army but for all those who are building bridges and houses and roads, for all the working people. Not a single colonist, not one of us hung back in the baggage-train, as Comrade Kirov puts it, Stalin's closest friend and helper. There's only one rat still among us whom we haven't laid our hands on yet. There were some tools stolen from the factory only yesterday. You've seen how those dirty bugs ran out of our city on the diagram the emulation staff drew? We have a dirty bug of that sort living among us. And we girls ask you, Comrade Colonists, not to take things easy, not to go in for any festivities on our account until we've caught that bug and—er—arrested him. One thing more, we girls ask that we should celebrate the day we catch him better than we've ever celebrated anything here!”

As they listened to Oksana everyone forgot who worked on this machine or the other, who was on the left flank or the right or in the centre. They all remembered the theatre curtain, Zaikharov's silver watch, the missing overcoats of the year before, and the many tools and articles stolen from the colony. They remembered Volenko too. And they all agreed with her that when that rat was caught they'd have to have a bigger celebration in the colony than they'd ever had.

Then, when she had finished they all felt that there was no need to reply to such a speech. It was clear to all and it expressed what was in everybody's mind. Yet who should ask for the floor but Vorgunov? What could have happened to him?

Grunting from the exertion Vorgunov climbed on to the steps below the bust of Stalin. He did not want to speak from where he sat. He wanted to make a real speech. The colonists were intensely interested in what was going to happen next. He placed himself right in front of the banner detachment and raised a finger: “Oksana Litovchenko, the girl who has just spoken, is commander of the fifth detachment. And here am I, an old man, an old engineer, paying her my deep respects and saying: Well done, Oksana Litovchenko! She spoke about the most important thing: the dirty rats crawling under our feet and messing up our work. I tell you frankly, when I came here I thought, oh they're just fooling with the kids; there'll never be a factory there! I'm not one for playing the toady to anyone, and I've never toadied to you, and never will. But now I've taken a look at you and I can say we can go together along the same road. Let's get the new factory straightened up and start it running. As for those bugs, we'll use boiling water on 'em, eh, you and I together?”

The colonists applauded the old engineer joyfully. Was he not another addition to their fighting strength on the front?

“Only remember this. I'm a strict man when it comes to work,” Vorgunov continued. “I don't say I'm terribly strict but I'm well... no less strict than Alexei Stepanovich!”

“That suits us!” cried the colonists.

“Suits you, does it? Then let's shake on it. And so you'll listen to me, eh?”

“And what about you listening to us?”

“Listen to you? Well, sometimes I'll have to, I suppose.”

Vorgunov laughed at them from his place below Stalin's bust, and the boys laughed back from the benches. The band laughed too, and the banner detachment and the four ranks of girls....

The next day's report announced:

"The enemy has abandoned the walls of the new city. Our forces entered the city all along the front. Our red flags have been hoisted above all the battlements. The enemy's remnants have crept to the building site and are hiding between barrels and packing cases and among the scaffolding and on rubbish heaps. Some of them have settled in the old 'stadium.' By order of the Commanders' Council the enemy is to be routed out of its last hiding-places during September so that we shall be able to celebrate the anniversary of the Revolution without a single enemy in the colony."

19

That's What Enthusiasm Is

It was Vorgunov's idea to set aside a month for clearing up the territory of the building site and the old and new buildings. He probably calculated correctly that the energy of all the eleven detachments would be enough to cope with the task. But on August 31 the general meeting announced its decisions:

1. In present circumstances school work is out of the question. The school year will start on September 15 and accordingly the winter vacation will be cancelled.
2. The "end work" signal will be abolished. Work will continue as long as possible.
3. Each detachment will be responsible for its own section of work.
4. The job is to be finished by September 15.

On September 1 all detachments set to work immediately after breakfast—in a single shift. Vorgunov had not expected this. He had counted on 100 man-days a day and besides that had deducted 35 per cent allowance on the colonists' age. But at the end of the first day he saw that he had at his disposal two hundred man-days for the full eight-hour period, and as for his deductions it was difficult to make head or tail of them. In many places the work had an undoubtedly childish character.

The building area immediately took on a new look. Previously about two hundred workers had been employed on it—carpenters, house-painters, plasterers and navvies. They remained, there were no changes in the main body of the builders and it seemed that the colonists' appearance made no 'essential difference to the pattern of work. These boys and girls had less physical strength and less skill than the workers, but they were like blood in the organism. They were impetuous and ubiquitous. They found their way into every sector with their talk and laughter, their demands and their assurance; everywhere their lissom bodies were to be seen, dragging things about with grunts and cries, then suddenly growing restive like sparrows and the whole flock of them scattering and settling at some new place where help was needed.

Inside the factory building where there was a dip in the ground the girls worked. Theirs was a difficult job—they had to fill in the cavity with earth. Thousands of loads of

earth had to be carried into the building before the floor could be laid and foundations built for the machines.

At some strictly secret meeting the girls decided to carry the soil at the run. The first day this took everybody by surprise but the boys said: "They'll grow tired of it. Nobody can keep that up."

But the girls went on working at the run the next day, and the third day too, and it became evident that far from growing tired they were simply getting used to working that way.

Then the talk among the boys took quite another turn: "Just look, now they're running with full hods as well as with empty ones."

Vorgunov began to get worried about this child speed. More and more frequently he visited the building to watch the work. Pair after pair flew past him.

"Good morning, Pyotr Petrovich," the girls would call through their laughter. "What are the boys up to, taking things easy?"

The teachers and instructors joined the colonists at work. The middle-aged instructress from the dressmaking-shop ran like the girls, protesting shyly and happily: "They're pitiless, these girls, wearing out an old soul like me. It's all very well for them, they're so nimble but how can I be expected to keep up with them?"

At least they do slow down a bit" when they're paired with me."

An old bricklayer sitting on the ground near the all-but-complete beds for the lathes opened his toothless mouth in a guffaw: "I've never seen the likes of this before, not in all my days. They are a tough lot, they are! Laughing and twittering all the time! I look at 'em and it makes me think, eh, if I could only shed a few of my years.... Oh, I'd have been running among 'em and beating the best of 'em at it, I would!"

He suddenly sprang to his feet and rushed after Lena Ivanova and Lyuba Rotshtein.

The fourth detachment was given a special job to do—crushing rubble for concrete 'mixing. Like flames before the jet of a fire-hose the brick chips that lay all over the building site disappeared under the boys' hammers. You would see the lads in one place and before you had time to look round they would be somewhere else squatting on the ground and, as usual, arguing as they wielded their hammers.

. "If the bed moves it's a planer, but if the cutting-tool moves then it's called a shaping machine! Oh, there's one little shaper over there called a Keystone!"

"A shaper's a planer too."

"No, it's a planer if the bed moves."

"What do you keep talking about a bed for?"

"That's the right term for it."

"You'll be talking about the blanket moving next. And then you'll be saying the sheet moves!"

"You're always quarrelling," said Bratsan examining the crushed rubble. "Come on, take this off to the building area."

"How are we going to carry it? In our hands?"

“Haven’t you got any carriers?” “The girls have taken them. They’re short of em.”

“Well, go along and get ‘em back.”

“Just you try! If you start arguing with them it’s a sure way to get yourself reported, and then it’s always they who’re in the right, of course! They told a fib about me yesterday. Said I was rude to them when I didn’t say a thing!”

Bratsan’s detachment worked on one of the grandest sectors of all—they were asphaltting the pavements. Three times a day a lorry arrived with a cauldron full of boiling tar, in which the asphalt was mixed. Hundreds of yards of broad paths were being laid throughout the colony. In some places they were finished. Elsewhere trenches were still being dug which Bratsan’s detachment was filling with rubble and concrete.

Pokhozhai’s detachment had the job of dismantling the scaffolding from the main factory building. It was such pleasant work that the Commanders’ Council almost got into a quarrel about it and had to draw lots to decide who was to do the job. When the ninth detachment drew the lucky number, Pokhozhai dashed straight out to the main building, followed by all his men. This detachment was the principal cause of Vorgunov’s worries. He stood down below and groaned with anxiety. On this particular day the scaffolding was being removed from a corner of the building where the gangways and catwalks were specially complicated. A twenty-metre beam had got jammed and was sticking almost vertically in the web of ‘Scaffolding. The colonists¹ clung to it like burrs and tried to heave it out. Jean Griffé stood on the topmost plank and wielded a blacksmith’s hammer, on which Vorgunov kept his eyes glued. He had never heard of scaffolding being dismantled with the help of a blacksmith’s hammer. Griffé went on dealing resounding blows at the planks in the adjacent gangway and these came tumbling down so effectively that Griffé himself began to wobble on his narrow pedestal. Those colonists who worked below him dodged the heavy objects flying past them to the ground.

“What do you think you’re doing up there? Are you crazy?” shouted Vorgunov.

“What’s up?” Griffé asked with surprise and looked down. The whole detachment did likewise as if they had not the slightest idea what Vorgunov was talking about.

But Vorgunov had already forgotten about Griffé’s destructive hammer. His attention had been caught by little Sinitsyn who was climbing up the vertical beam with a rope between his teeth. Vorgunov waved his arms and shouted as loudly as his low hoarse voice would permit: “Where are you off to? Where the devil are you taking that rope to?”

Sinitsyn looked down at him with an enquiring look.

“Come down at once! You little so-and-so, come down, I tell you!”

“Let him go on!” cried Pokhozhai from the top gangway. “Otherwise we’ll be on this job till evening. He’s only going to fix that rope.”

“But that beam’s not made fast!”

“It won’t fall,” said Pokhozhai. “The whole twelve of us lugged at it and it didn’t fall.”

The argument was purely academic. Sinitsyn had already shinned to the top of the beam and attached the rope to it. Vorgunov kept his eyes riveted on him.

“Come on, come on, say something to them,” he said to Dem who was standing nearby. “They make my hair stand on end! What are they up to?”

Dem’s lips twitched, his bushy moustache quivered comically. He was pointing to something. Vorgunov looked and saw a scene that was really -exciting—on the wooden roof of the shed stood about fifteen boys singing out: “This way—ooop! That way—ooop!”

They were rocking rhythmically from side to side, and with them rocked the entire shed on its feeble legs. It swayed more and more menacingly, its framework cracking, as its beams and plank-ends began to jut through its wooden walls. Vorgunov ran over to the shed shouting something. But he was too late. The shed collapsed in a cloud of dust to the sound of a series of frightful cracks, and into this murky chaos all fifteen colonists disappeared, as if swallowed up by the earth.

For a second their voices were stilled, but then once again their boyish laughter and romping shrieks rang out. The shed had vanished, reduced to a flattened pile of rubbish from under which the boys crawled out one after the other. Dem buried his face in his hands and ran off. Vorgunov stood still wiping the perspiration from his bald pate with a handkerchief. All the boys emerged from the debris and turned to examine the next shed. Little Korotak with the big ears shouted something and ran ahead. In a flash he was standing jubilant on the roof of the shed. By now Vorgunov was past shouting. It was again his bass voice with an imperative note to it.

“Hey, you there on the sheds! What detachment do you belong to?”

“The tenth,” several boys replied. “Where’s the commander?”

“Here I am, Comrade Vorgunov!”

Ilya Rudnev stood in front of Vorgunov, looking at the chief engineer with an innocent expression on his face as he waited for his instruction.

“What the hell is going on here?” Vorgunov asked in the same quiet deep voice.

“Why, what’s wrong?”

“Are you the commander of the tenth? What’s your name?”

“Rudnev.”

“As deputy-director I believe I have the right to put you under detention.”

“What for?” asked Rudnev, his eyes expressing guarded surprise.

“Where did you learn that method of taking a building apart?”

“What’s wrong with the method? That’s the third shed we’ve pulled down. There are only two more left.”

“I flatly forbid you to go on, do you understand?”

“Comrade Vorgunov!” Rudnev looked appealingly at the engineer. “Please let us pull the last two down. After all....”

“I said no.”

“What are two sheds, after all?”

“Take one hour’s detention! At once!”

“Very good, Comrade Vorgunov.” Rudnev saluted and, turning to the detachment, shouted: “Perlov, take over the detachment, I’m out of commission!”

“Very good, I’ll take over,” replied sturdy broad-shouldered Perlov, saluting.

Perlov turned immediately to the detachment.

“Don’t stand there gaping!” he ordered. “Storm the shed!”

The tenth detachment clambered on the roof. Vorgunov “gave in. Laying a hand on Rudnev’s shoulder he said plaintively: “Rudnev, be a good fellow and stop them! You can’t do things this way.”

“What way shall we do it then?”

“Stop them, Rudnev. Look, they’ve already started rocking!”

“Oh, don’t take any notice of ‘em!”

But Vorgunov finally exploded. He shouted, swore, bellowed orders and at last got his way. The tenth detachment climbed down. Later on, at the Commanders’ Council, Rudnev said in self-criticism; “There was, of course, some wanton waste of energy in our detachment. We took two days to pull down two sheds which we could have dealt with in a quarter of an hour if we had rationalized our methods.”

At one end of the building site the eighth detachment removed some unwanted trees in order to broaden the flower-bed in front of the new buildings. Here too there was some rationalizing: Igor and Sancho sawed away at the stout trunk of a felled oak on which Danilo Gorovoy sat placidly. Zakharov came up to them.

“Just look at our new commander, Alexei Stepanovich! Doesn’t give a fellow anything to do,” Gorovoy complained with a blush.

“It’s absolutely essential, Alexei Stepanovich!” explained Igor, stopping work on the saw. “You can’t consider Danilo as a prime mover in a case like this. It’s out of the question. You have to look at him as a press, on account of his weight and calm nature. No other colonist would sit there while we are sawing, but Danilo will all right.”

“H’m,” Zakharov nodded. “You’re right. And how do you make use of Danilo’s other qualities?”

“The next quality is his weight. You see Danilo sits at one end. Danilo, smile, please! That makes it much easier to saw because the oak’s so damn tough that the saw jams. There’s no other way out.”

“But perhaps you could use Comrade Gorovoy as an auxiliary force so that one of you could rest while the other two sawed?”

“That’s completely unprofitable. We tried but the efficiency coefficient fell catastrophically!”

Gorovoy listened hard and then began to clamber down off the trunk.

“Oh, Alexei Stepanovich,” complained Igor. “You see you’ve brought discord into our toiling family.”

Zakharov smiled and walked off. Looking round from afar he saw Igor and Zorin sawing with Gorovoy back on the tree-trunk.

Each of the colony's eleven detachments had a responsible task to fulfil, and Vorgunov had to keep a watchful eye on all of them. Everywhere he was worried to find their speed too "childish." After a working day packed with trial and tribulation he would stroll into Zakharov's office with a: "Well, I must say I'm surprised how you can work with such folk."

Vorgunov used to feel at a loose end "in the evenings. He walked bored and aimless about the building site for a while and then gave in to the impulse to visit the boys in their dormitories. Once he came to the ninth detachment, sat down and said:

"Did you get that beam out, Comrade Pokhzhai?"

"Which one?"

"The one that was sticking up so high."

"Do you mean the one at the corner or the one near the foundry or the one at the back of the place?"

Vorgunov wiped his bald pate and calmed down.

"I see," he said after a pause. "So you shifted *three* beams? Well, let's forget it.... I see you live pretty well here. Bright and clean by the look of it."

Then they all became involved in an argument about enthusiasm.

"We'll be working with enthusiasm when we get going in the new factory, Pyotr Petrovich," said Pokhzhai.

"What exactly do you mean by enthusiasm?"

"In a Komsomol way!"

"I see."

"Don't you believe in enthusiasm?"

"What's all this talk about believing in things? I either know something or I don't."

"And don't you know about enthusiasm?"

"Of course I do. But tell me, do you know geometry?"

"Yes, we do."

"What's the formula for measuring the area of a circle?"

" πr^2 "

"Can you change that formula with enthusiasm?"

"Why ask such things? Enthusiasm has nothing to do with spoiling formulas!"

"But, you see, you spoiled plenty of formulas today."

"When did we do that?"

"When you dismantled the scaffolding, for instance."

"What formulas were there in that?"

"There were formulas at every step. If a beam is standing it must be resting against something. There are certain laws of resistance in materials and so on."

According to these laws there's also a Soviet law which says you can't dismantle scaffolding that way. But you climb about like South Sea Islanders with ropes between your teeth. And did you see the way Rudnev and his detachment' took that shed to pieces? How many formulas do you think he spoiled? And you said yourself that it's wrong to spoil them."

The ninth detachment shouted with excitement and at once raised objections:

"But what If there's a war on? Do you have formulas in war too?" _

"Of course you do."

"What? D'you mean to say you fight by formula?"

"Listen to me, boys. War's a very serious business. You have to be ready to die for your native land. There's your first formula for you. Isn't that so? Ah, I've caught you there! Well, do you think you have the right to die foolishly?"

"What do you mean foolishly?"

"Well, say you were just to step out of the trench and start waving your arms about. You'd be potted at once! Do you think you've the right to do that?"

"Yes, if you want to...."

"Nothing doing. Nobody has the right to want to do that. You're a soldier, you're needed, you haven't the right to get yourself killed! Isn't that so? Ha, caught you again! Well, .good-bye for the present. Tomorrow I won't let you spoil any formulas."

He got up and left, all eyes on him.

"See what sort of fellow he is?" said Pokhzhai. "Against enthusiasm."

"No, he isn't, you can't say that."

"What, he's not against it?"

"No, he's not."

"Of course, he is."

From the ninth detachment this question ran through the whole colony. Both at work and play the boys tried to find the right answer to it.

While this research into the nature of enthusiasm was going on, work on the construction area went at its previous pace and Vorgunov was not always able to defend his formulas. By September 15 the place was unrecognizable. The fine outlines of the buildings were now laid bare. Flower-beds and paths ran around them like beautiful ribbons. Inside the shops the machines were ranged accurately on the dazzlingly new floor. Here and there plasterers were still at work and for them life became hard. Armed sentries were posted at the factory doors and mats, dry as well as moist, placed on the ground.

"Wipe your feet, comrade."

"Eh?"

"Wipe your feet!"

"Are you talking to me?"

"Yes. Please wipe your feet, there's the mat."

“But I’m a plasterer, old man!”

“Makes no difference.”

“Ever heard of a plasterer wiping his feet?”

“Yes, I have.”

The plasterers wiped their boots, something that had never happened before anywhere, and turned shocked looks on the sentries. Later they went to complain to Vorgunov and Zakharov.

“Did you wipe ‘em?” Vorgunov asked.

“Yes.”

“And felt none the worse for it?”

“No, why should I?”

“Well, what’s the worry?”

Zakharov said: “I can’t do anything for you. They make me do the same.”

“You don’t say! You tool”

Thus the complaints were in vain.

On September 15, Vorgunov reported to the general meeting that the work had been completed. He was full of praise for all detachments and said not a word about formulas. After the meeting Pokhozhaï asked him:

“All the same I want you to tell me whether there is such a thing as enthusiasm or not.”

Vorgunov turned away with a sly look:

“There are various names for it, my friends. Honesty. Love. The heart. Have you got a heart?”

“I suppose so....”

“Well, there you are! That’s what enthusiasm is.”

20

In the New Factory

The students—the visiting ones as well as the new ones—had already left the colony. They were given a ceremonial send-off with speeches under the banner and an escort to the station, where some went as far as to shed a few tears. But not, of course, the fourth detachment.

The girls cried the most, for they found it hard to part with Klava Kashirina, but it was not easy for the eighth detachment and some of the others to take leave of Nesterenko, Kolos, Sadovnichy and Grossman.

But there were newcomers to replace them—boys and girls straight from their homes or from the “free life,” and some from the hands of the militia. Igor Chernyavin was commander on duty the day they arrived. He recalled the day when Volenko led him into the colony. And where was Volenko now?

The newcomers were in luck to be entering the colony just at this time. Slum's old work-shops were already closed and autumn grass had begun to spring up—there was no stopping it!—covering the old tracks trodden out by the colonists. The “stadium” did not get burnt down after all. It took the labourers only a few days to dismantle this remarkable building. Nobody regretted its disappearance, not even Blum who could now breathe freely and forget about the fire.

Blum was now appointed chief of the supply and delivery department. The day of his appointment he expressed his gratitude to the colonists for the heroic fighting spirit they had shown in the old factory and recalled the strain and anxiety they had gone through to earn six hundred thousand roubles for the new factory. He told them he would remember that wonderful year all his life. There were tears in Slum's eyes. He made no attempt to hide them and nobody reproached him for those tears. Then he recovered his spirits and went so far as to say: “I used to think that my curve was falling. But I tell you now, Comrade Colonists, that while my heart goes on beating there'll be no decline. Sancho Zorin was right when he said that it was the opportunists who invented that curve.”

Late that evening in Zakharov's office Blum had quite forgotten about the old factory and had plunged heart and soul into getting ready for his new job of supply and delivery.

“With the shield or under the shield, I'll see we have good supplies, for your information,” he told Zakharov.

Zakharov gave him an approving hug but suggested a slight correction in Slum's battle cry:

“It should be ‘with the shield or on the shield,’ Solomon Davidovich. That's what the Greeks used to say.”

“Didn't they say ‘under the shield’?”

“No, they didn't say that.”

“I see, they didn't need to be under the shield, eh?”

“Quite right. The Greeks used that phrase when they set out to war. To come back with the shield meant to come back victorious. On the shield meant being brought back dead. So, you see it's ‘with the shield or on the shield.’”

Blum listened attentively to this history lesson but remained sceptical.

“If I understand you correctly it's ‘with the shield’ for us. ‘On the shield’ is out of the question altogether.. What sense would there be in the supply department being ‘on the shield’?”

“None at all....”

“Then let us put it this way: with a shield or with two shields! That's most suitable for the supply department.”

Armed with this amended classical slogan Blum flung himself into battle again. Soon he had at his disposal a light lorry driven by Misha Gontar.

Yes, the newcomers were in luck! They went straight to work in the new factory and from the very start of their life in the colony found themselves in what could be described only as an earthly paradise!

On September 17 over two hundred colonists entered the factory. Each was allotted a splendid place. Some went to the mechanical-shop or the foundry, others to the assembly-shop or to the tool-shop.

The mechanical-shop was housed on the ground floor. There was not, strictly speaking, a first floor to the building, but there was a balcony upstairs which ran round all four walls of the vast hall without interfering with it being lit from the roof. In the mechanical-shop stood about fifty first-rate machines, some 'Soviet-built, some foreign—turning-lathes, turret-lathes, grinding-lathes, planers, gear-cutters, milling-machines, drillers and slotters. Every machine was a beauty and had its own style of smartness. One gleamed with nickel parts, the next one looked modest and respectable in its mat-surfaced steel casing, the third polished and clever as a diplomat, while beyond it stood one that was really beautiful with the uniquely attractive lines of its black mirror-surfaced body. The small Keystone still wore its coat of yellow grease. It was being rubbed and smartened up by its attentive new masters, Filka Shary and Vanya Galchenko.

Among the first machines to go into operation were the Komsomolets and Krasny Proletary turning-lathes. The entire strength of the third and tenth detachments was put to work on them. Next day the turret-lathes started. These were manned by Zyriansky, Porshnev, Yanovsky and other old hands. Soon after the crucibles in the foundry went into commission and the shiny aluminium parts of the drill-casings began to come into the mechanical-shop. These parts—the upper and lower shields and the frame—were soon set spinning in the chucks of the turning- and-turret-lathes.

The nature of the work demanded precision and because the colonists had not yet acquired sufficient skill they worked as carefully as if they were in a laboratory. Every thirty seconds they brought callipers or a template to control the parts. Upstairs in the assembly-shop, occupied almost entirely by girls and younger boys, nimble fingers were required most from the workers. It would be many a day before complete drills would be ready but units were already being assembled and the first armature was already reaching the girls' hands.

After school hours, the Komsomol groups met in the lecture-rooms and studies to broaden the children's knowledge of the industrial process. There were many secrets to be revealed, for the work on each part set a highly complicated problem which could be solved only in combination with the nature of the machine and many involved adjustments. It was becoming clear during the process of assembly that here and there certain operations ought to be done differently and that many parts would be better produced by stamping than by cutting. The electric drills were fitted with a whole system of pinions and it was these that caused most worries. For a whole week engineer Beglov, black as coal, grim-faced and clumsy, prowled round the Marat gear-cutting machine. Both he and Semyon Kasatkin waited breathlessly for the first pinion to emerge from the machine, and when it did and its warm little body lay on Beglov's trembling palm, Kasatkin was almost in tears when he said: "The edges, are again nibbled..."

"It eats 'em up."

"Well, let's try with module number one."

Beglov looked at Kasatkin but he saw not the boy's big grey eyes but the sheet of paper covered with figures on which during the night he had calculated the work of the machine at module 0.75.

"No ... we'll have another shot at the devil."

"I won't work anyway," said Kasatkin, but he obediently set the lathe running and once again the two of them stood at it holding their breath.

Controllers began to make their appearance in the shops: Myatnikova, Zorin and Jean Griffe. They carried templates, models and various precision instruments. A new word "hundredth" made its appearance in the colony and stuck in the boys' vocabulary. On the first floor a Kelenberger grin ding-wheel was put into operation. Ostapchin and Pokhozhai extended to it all the wealth of loving care which was to be found in the heart of a colonist. Here too the grinding of shafts began with a measurement check every minute. But in a fortnight Pokhozhai was pronouncing the word "hundredth" without the slightest respect.

"What's your order? Take off half a hundredth? Certainly, Comrade Instructor...."

Pokhozhai starts the machine running and bends slightly over it. His eyes, his nerves, his fifth, sixth, tenth senses, all are concentrated on calculating the finest movements of the tool. Finally he catches the sly fleeting moment of precision, switches off the machine and hands the part to the instructor: "Half a hundredth off, Comrade Instructor! Take it, please."

The works were getting under way. Several shelves in the stores were already filled up with completed parts, whole packing-cases of metal shavings were removed from the floor of the shops, the Commanders' Council was finding fault with the jigs and held the young engineer Komarov to account for it. Komarov came in with his usually pale face red with embarrassment.

"We've done everything we possibly can do in the tool-shop," he protested. "There are still forty adjustments to be done but they'll be ready within a week. We were held up for shortage of No. 4 steel which Solomon Davidovich promised...."

The colonists heard Komarov out for they trusted and respected him, but all the same they asked: "But when the No. 4 steel came why was it left lying in the stores for a couple of days until it occurred to someone to go and get it?"

"And why was there a mistake in the blue-prints of the conductor for detail one hundred and thirteen?"

Komarov's colour grew even deeper and he cast an appealing glance at Vorgunov, but in vain.

"Aha! Why are you looking at me?" asked the chief engineer. "It's them you ought to be looking at."

Filka Shary, sitting as usual on the floor, also ventured an opinion.

"It's all because Ivan Semyonovich pays too much attention to his—er—to Nadezhda Vasilyevna...."

"Behave yourself, Filka," fumed Torsky. "Really that's too much! You're always having to be turned out of the Council."

Shary made an angry pout and averted his face. He could not remember a time when justice was done to him. But after that remark of Shary's, Komarov's position was also somewhat awkward. Rapidly turning over the sheets in the tool-shop file he mumbled: "I cannot—er—remarks of that sort.... I was appointed to work here, not to listen to...."

The commanders tactfully turned their eyes to the window. Oksana's lips curled faintly. Zakharov adjusted his pince-nez.

That evening Komarov handed in his resignation to Zakharov. The director placed the written application on the desk before him and read it through with an incredulous look.

"There's no need for that, Ivan Semyonovich!"

"What do you mean? What right have they... my private life...."

"But, really, what's it all about? There's nothing in your private life to be ashamed of. We all know that you're in love with Nadezhda Vasilyevna, we all sympathize with you, we're all delighted, but, of course. Filka doesn't understand anything about all that."

For some ten days after this incident Komarov walked about the colony looking glum and trying to avoid meeting Nadezhda Vasilyevna. Another ten days passed and he had another tiff with the Commanders' Council, though over another matter this time. The Council wanted to transfer Redka to the mechanical-shop. Komarov opposed this for a long time and then burst out angrily: "You'd better know this then! If you take Redika from me I shall leave the factory altogether!"

He was pale and angry and looked challengingly at the astonished commanders.

"Quite right too," said Shary. "What next, I wonder?"

The Council gave in.

"You see, you stuck up for yourself and came out on top," Zakharov said to Komarov that evening.

Komarov smiled and went straight off to spend the rest of the evening with Nadezhda Vasilyevna.

The greatest difficulties were experienced in Blum's sphere of activity. Here thunder-clouds were always piling up. All the money had been spent on building and equipping the new factory which was not producing anything yet, while the old one was shut. Blum was kept on the hop.

"We're getting as many enquiries as you want. They're offering to pay a lot in advance. All we have to do is to sign a contract for delivering the drills."

"We haven't made any drills yet," replied Zakharov.

"But we're going to make them, aren't we?"

"The first lot'll probably be defective."

"What on earth does that matter? We can sell them, can't we?"

"No, we can't."

"Please, Alexei Stepanovich, if you mean to say such things you'd better find someone with good nerves. Mine are in a very poor state. Do you mean to say we can't sell our finished products?"

Zakharov said nothing more.

“Am I a man or a crazy horse?” Blum sighed in anguish.

Running the new factory, like all serious things in life, turned out to be no easy matter. There were bottlenecks in some places; in others, where everything had seemed to be going serenely according to plan, mysterious complications arose. Blum's were not the only nerves to get rattled. Occasionally, the peace of mind of the fourth detachment started to go to pieces too as the boys were racked with that sense of anxiety which is also called a sense of responsibility. The colonists regarded the new factory as an unprecedented stroke of happiness for them. For them that new life which they knew the October Revolution had given the people of their country was inseparable from the new electric tool factory. And for that reason everybody longed passionately for the time to come soon when drills would be produced, when representatives of the Red Army and of industry would come to collect them and the Soviet Government issue a decree prohibiting the import of foreign power drills.

Igor Chernyavin was allotted the best machine in the factory—a Samson Wenke surface-grinding Lathe. It stood in a corner of the mechanical-shop next to the Keystone shaper.

“This machine's the most likeable creature in the world,” Igor told his comrades. “You can even talk to it, it's so nice.”

Igor really did talk to the lathe, especially when he turned up at work in the morning. It was certainly a fetching machine. The flat part that required grinding did not have to be fixed to the table. All Igor had to do was to touch a switch and the part was glued to the steel table as if it were permanently fixed to it.

“It's a magnetized table,” Igor said. “None of your pre-revolutionary chucks about that!”

Igor, however, suffered a misfortune. In a little drawer in the body of this lathe he used to keep a bottle of very expensive special lapping oil which Blum had obtained with great difficulty for this machine alone. One morning when Igor came to work and opened the drawer the bottle was gone. At first he thought he might have forgotten to put it away there and he searched for it all over the machine. Then he thought for a while.

“Signer!” he addressed the machine in alarm. “Yesterday I lubricated you and put the bottle back in the drawer! What, have you done with it?”

But the grinder was silent though it was clear from the expression on its face that it also felt upset about the mishap. Filka was working alongside on his Keystone. Igor stole a suspicious glance at him and at his machine too but both of them looked the acme of virtue. And though Igor sought for his lubricating oil throughout the day he did not find it.

Such incidents had ceased to cause any surprise among the colonists. The thefts continued. With the opening of the new factory they were mainly directed towards the tools. Not a day passed without something being stolen from one machine or another: micrometers, callipers, various appliances, wrenches, expensive cutting-tools. Zakharov issued instructions that everything was to be locked up in the store-room after work except for running parts belonging to the particular machine's inventory and those were

to be kept under lock and key in the lockers. However, that did not help, things went on disappearing from the lockers. Bankovsky, the former founder who had been put in charge of the tool store, spent all his time drawing up documents about the missing tools and taking them to Vergunov for signing.

“What a place.... Half the colony are thieves. They’ll pinch the lot, you’ll see.”

Vorgunov would frown, sign reluctantly, turn away from Bankovsky and then go off to Zakharov.

“What are we going to do? We can’t go on working this way! Micrometers -are very expensive things and not easy to get hold of.”

Zakharov listened to him in silence, and turned abruptly in his chair. He gripped one of his knees with a fist; he rested his other elbow on his thigh and bit his lips. Vorgunov kept his eyes on him.

“How many little thieves do you think there are in the colony?” Vorgunov asked.

“There are some little thieves, of course, Pyotr Petrovich,” said Zakharov without shifting his position. “But our little thieves are people with hearts and feelings; they wouldn’t steal things from the factory.”

“Well, who’s doing it then? Tell me who? Every night I tremble to think that our milling-tools may be stolen. If that happened we’d be stuck a long while. There’s not a tool of that kind in the whole town. They’re no use to anybody except us. And you know what it means to make milling-tools!”

It is said that if a man has a birth-mark on his face he grows used to it. The thefts in the colony were a kind of unsightly birth-mark which spoiled the clean human face of the collective, but the colonists could not grow used to it.

Igor spent several days looking for his bottle of oil while other boys searched for their missing micrometers, and callipers, but the thoughts of all were not on their outraged machines but on the common misfortune and the helplessness of the colony in the face of it.

Igor was still searching when before dinner one day Ryzhikov, who was commander on duty, went into Zakharov’s office and, neglecting even to stand correctly, exclaimed: “Another theft, Alexei Stepanovich. All the milling-tools from the gear-cutters have gone, every one of ‘em!”

“What?” “There’s not one left. All eighteen have gone.”

Zakharov removed his pince-nez and laid them on the desk. He pressed his fingers hard against his eyes and then for a long time went on stroking his cheeks.

“Very well,” he said at length.

“We ought to have a search, Alexei Stepanovich!”

“There’s no need for a search.”

Ryzhikov heaved a sigh, saluted in silence and went out.

At five o'clock that afternoon Filka Shary and Vanya Galchenko came out of Zakharov's office. Begunok summoned the commanders to meet. Ryzhikov was surprised to hear the bugle-call: a signal without the commander on duty being informed was unusual. He went to see Zakharov about it.

"Ah yes," said Zakharov, "you must excuse me but it was a matter of urgency. I wanted to see you anyway and tell you to have supper delayed. We'll be having it later this evening."

Before the commanders gathered, Igor Chernyavin came to Zakharov.

"I know that Filka and Vanya pinched that bottle of oil," he said. "Please question them thoroughly about it."

"But you've no proof, have you?"

"If I could prove it I wouldn't be bothering you with it, I'd take it straight to the Commanders' Council. But you question them well. They work next to me on the Keystone. They pinched it all right."

Vorgunov, Blum and Nadezhda Vasilyevna were sitting in the office at the time, but this did not embarrass Igor. Now nothing mattered. No consideration of persons. He must be pitiless. Zakharov smiled for some reason and was obviously not of Igor's opinion.

"What can I do?" he asked.

"Give it to them good and proper, Alexei Stepanovich. I'll fetch them."

"Go on."

This did not take Igor long. He merely opened the door and called: "Hey you step in here."

The accused obviously had no difficulty in guessing 'who was meant to "step in." Shary and Vanya walked into the office and saluted Zakh-arov in all form. Vanya meekly took a seat on the settee and at once started examining the ceiling. Shary stayed at the desk in readiness for an argument with the director, Zakharov adjusted his pince-nez and began to speak in a fairly stern voice.

"Look here, Chernyavin says you two took his bottle of oil."

Shary looked up at Igor.

"We pinched your oil? Funny, aren't you! We didn't take anything."

"And I say you did!" asserted Igor.

Shary brought all his wonderful powers of mimicry into play. He was persuasive, serious, and vigorous.

"Judge for yourself, Igor, why should we need your oil? We've got our own."

"Mine's a special sort. Very expensive."

"Oh, yours is special, is it? I'm sorry about that! Where did you keep it?"

"Stop that shamming! You know very well where I kept it. In the little drawer in the machine."

Shary looked deeply impressed. He even wagged his head.

"I can imagine how upset you are!"

“Listen to him! Imagine, indeed! You’ve had your eye on that oil for a long time.”

“We didn’t even know you had it- Isn’t that so, Vanya?”

Vanya did not seem to be at all interested in this conversation. He was more interested in letting his eyes roam around the office which suited him very well as it enabled him to avoid meeting the looks that Blum, Vorgunov and others cast at him. And while he gazed round the office Vanya energetically shook his head to convey that he really knew nothing at all about the oil bottle.

“Just look at the scoundrel!” Igor shouted. “He dares to stand there and say he didn’t know about the oil! Weren’t you always begging me to give you some-for your own machine? Weren’t you?”

“Yes.... We were,” Shary concurred good-naturedly.

“Well, what about that?”

“Oh, that doesn’t mean anything. You didn’t let us have any, and that’s the end of the story.”

“And how many times did you ask Solomon Davidovich to buy you some oil like it? You were almost blubbing about it! Buy us some, buy us some! What do you say to that?”

What, indeed, was Shary going to say to that? Everybody grew interested. Zakharov even leaned forward and sat with his face between his fists. Shary drew a deep breath and lifted an arm to add emphasis to his words.

“As if that meant anything! All right, we asked. But it’s not true about blubbing though. We just asked.”

“Well, its very strange that for the past four days you’ve stopped asking and yapping for the oil, don’t you think?”

“All it means is that we’ve stopped yapping, doesn’t it?” Shary whispered, averting his face.

“But why?”

“How long did you expect us to worry him for it? He didn’t buy it. What could we do about it? Bough! it for you but not for us. Seems you’re a special favourite of his.”

“Ah what a mean little boy!” This from Blum on the settee. He could not keep up his neutrality.

Vanya did not turn his head. People could say what they liked so far as he was concerned. But- Shary looked round and to everybody’s surprise bestowed a charming smile on Blum. Blum wagged a finger at him threateningly.

“Then tell me how you do your lubrication,” Igor pursued the topic.

Shary had probably not expected this thrust. Vanya too gave a jerk and pricked up his ears. Shary again had to turn away with an injured look.

“The usual way, like—er—”

“I know. You get up early when everybody else is asleep and go to the shop. Through the window. Filka does the oiling while Vanya keeps a look-out. That’s right, isn’t it?”

Zakharov now held Shary's eyes with his own. Most uncomfortable. Nobody could very well stand that for long.... Shary did not go into details and answered shortly.

"We lubricate the way that suits us best...."

From the settee Vanya Galchenko supported him with ringing words to Igor.

"And if you like you too can get up earlier than anybody else and do your oiling."

Igor made a gesture of helplessness. Blum thought it expedient to use another method of approach.

"You're such fine little boys..." he began.

But Zakharov cut his well-intentioned effort short. With his head still between his fists he said slowly: "Be off, the pair of you. What impudence!"

Shary and Vanya raised their arms simultaneously. Their salute was a merry one but Igor received the briefest of looks that was at once blighting and challenging. Nudging each other, the boys got out of the office. Only Igor failed to join in the general laughter.

"Well, what are you to do with them?" he asked disgruntled.

"I'll buy you some more of that oil, Comrade Chernyavin," Blum consoled him. "Let them go on using yours. They're quite in love with their Keystone."

"Well, you didn't get anything out of them about the oil, Comrade Chernyavin," Vorgunov said with a laugh.

"Out of them? I'm on good terms with them and you see how they take advantage of it. When they have used up the whole bottleful they'll own up, but before that they won't say a word! They don't want to give it back. But I'd like to know where they've hidden it! I've had a look in their dormitory already."

"While they were there?"

"Of course. Do you think I'd stand on ceremony ¹ with the likes of them?"

"Yes, they're a smart pair, all right. Ah, I can't get the thought of those milling-tools out of my mind..."

At that moment Bankovsky looked in at the door.

"I'm wanted in the Council, aren't I, Alexei Stepanovich?"

"Yes, that's right. Please come to it. The matter's very important."

"Is it about the milling-tools?"

"Yes, among other things."

Bankovsky disappeared,

"I didn't know you were having a meeting about the milling-tools," said Vorgunov.

"Yes," said Zakharov leaving his desk. "And I hope that they'll be on your desk today, Pyotr Petrovich."

Begunok flung the door open.

"The Commanders' Council is ready, Alexei Stepanovich."

Torsky, himself somewhat surprised by the extraordinary Council meeting, opened the session. "I give the floor to Alexei Stepanovich." Zakharov looked around at his commanders and the usual visitors.

"I have very little to say. Just to ask you to call on Filka Shary to make his report."

"Report? From Filka?"

"Yes, Comrade Shary will present a report, and on a very grave matter. True, I did not know that it was going to be necessary to add to it the matter of Comrade Chernyavin's bottle of oil, but all the same I ask you to listen carefully to the reporter."

Filka Shary rose to his feet with the grave manner suitable for the part and walked to Torsky's desk.

Catching sight of Lida Talikova's inappropriately merry face, he dropped his eyes for an instant.

"Early this morning," he began, "before reveille, Vanya Galcihencko and I went to the shop...."

"To lubricate the Keystone," Vorgunov muttered under his breath.

The commanders burst out laughing.

"Uh-huh!" Filka nodded seriously. "We've the right to Lubricate our shaper, haven't we?"

"With pinched oil?" interposed Igor. Shary appealed to the chair.

"Vitya, I protest... it's insulting."

"Go on; go on," said Torsky, "never mind the insults."

"Vanya and I entered the shop and got ready to-do the oiling when in came Ryzhikov and Bankovsky from the foundry. We jumped behind Igor's Samson Wer^ke and...."

There was a sudden crash, the sound of a blow,, followed by a lot of unusual noises and then Zyriansky's - shout:

"No, you don't! I've had my eye on you!"

Ryzhikov came hurtling from the door into the-middle of the room. He fell with his face to the floor and when he lifted his head his mouth was bleeding. Everybody sprang from his place.

"Order, Colonists!" shouted Zakharov. "What do you think you're doing, Zyriansky? Pick that fellow up Bratsan!"

But Ryzhikov got up by himself and stood in the middle of the room wiping his mouth with his sleeve, which wore the bright silk arm band of the commander on duty. Zyriansky came quickly to him and wrenched the arm band off. He flung it on the floor in disgust and hissed in Ryzhikov's face:

"You'd even defile the red arm band, you rat!.. You ask what I'm doing, Alexei Stepanovich? He was trying to get out of the room. I've had my eye on him since first thing this morning. He was sitting right up against the door. Must have sniffed what was up in the Council."

"That's enough, Zyriansky. Nobody knows anything yet." Torsky nodded to Filka. Ryzhikov remained standing in the middle. It was hard to imagine anybody willing to make room for him on the bench.

It had suddenly come clear to all that Ryzhikov was the enemy. Ryzhikov himself made no attempt, to deny it. He did not utter a word, made no protest against the use of force and stood with his head hanging down, looking at the spot on the floor where his soft nose had just taken such a hard knock. Now all eyes were sharp and tense on Filka Shary.

"Tell us what you saw, get on with it," one of the commanders urged him.

"Well, we hid behind the Samson Werke and sat there. And Bankovsky said to Ryzhikov: 'last night Beglov was fussing about with the milling-tools till late.' I know where they are. And off they went, oh, they had such a lot of skeleton keys. They'd *got* Semyon's locker open in a jiffy and pinched the tools. Then Ryzhikov said: 'did you sell the callipers?' And Bankovsky replied: 'no, I didn't, they're not worth much.' Not worth much, that's what he said! Then Ryzhikov laughed and said: 'now we'll see a bit of fun when they find out the milling-tools have gone!' But Bankovsky, he didn't laugh at all but spoke serious like: huh! riff-raff like them trying to build a factory! He didn't say anything after that, just looked very angry. Ryzhikov wasn't angry though. He was laughing all the time. Then they went out. They took the tools with them. Bankovsky had them in his pockets. We forgot all about oiling the machine and ran away. We told Alyosha Zyriansky about it, and then we went to Alexei Stepanovich."

Shary had finished. He looked at Zakharov. The director took hold of the boy's belt, drew Shary towards him and kept him standing beside him till the end of the meeting,

All eyes were now on Bankovsky. He sat in a corner with his legs crossed. One of his legs was twitching.

"What have you got to say, Bankovsky?" asked Torsky.

Bankovsky looked up. Though his face was pale it showed no signs of fear.

"I've nothing to say. D'you think those kids' prattle means anything!"

Zyriansky laughed straight in his face.

"He's got nothing to say and we've nothing to ask him. We've got to make an immediate search of his room."

"Have we got the right to?"

"We'll do it anyway. Perhaps Bankovsky will give us his permission? Will you, Citizen Bankovsky?"

Zyriansky put the question mockingly, and there was mockery too in the way the colonists looked at Bankovsky, but the man answered with a show of defiance all the same.

"I've no particular objections, though you've no right to search. Imagine if everybody starts searching just like that...."

"Then we'll do it without your permission...."

Everybody looked hard at Zakharov. He waved his hand.

“We can’t let this opportunity pass. There’s no question of permission being needed. You were caught red-handed, Bankovsky, and we’re not going to stand” on any ceremony with you.”

“Who caught me?” shouted Bankovsky.

“We did! We caught you, do you understand? Torsky, send a commission for the search. Three people.”

A commission was appointed without delay: Zyriansky, Chernyavin and Pokhzhai.

“Off you go,” said Torsky. “You’re in charge, Zyriansky.”

“Shall we take Bankovsky with us?”

“I won’t go anywhere with you and I won’t give you the keys either. I protest strongly.”

Shary used the ensuing pause to say in a deep voice:

“You go along with them, Bankovsky, and stop playing the fool.”

After that Bankovsky left in silence, accompanied by the commission.

Only then did everybody remember that Ryzhikov was standing with a bruised nose in the middle of the room.

“Perhaps Ryzhikov has something to tell us?” enquired Zakharov quietly.

To the surprise of all the face that Ryzhikov raised wore a pathetic look. It was a face that begged and prayed for understanding and sympathy. He blinked his eyes, he wrinkled his brow in anguish. And he told the commanders many interesting things. Perhaps he thought that by being frank he could win over the colonists, perhaps he wanted to shift all the blame on to Bankovsky’s shoulders, but the fact remained that after he had told his tale there was not a mystery left unsolved. The overcoats, the curtain, the silver watch, tools of all sorts, all kinds of incidents were cleared up. It was he who had put the wrench in Levitin’s locker. Twice he had set fire to the old “stadium.” Ryzhikov told his tale in a monotonous woe-begone voice, exaggerating nothing, adding no embroideries, but not neglecting to blink and grimace.

“Bankovsky said to me: ‘if we can only get ‘them to suspect the commanders! We must get the commanders involved!..’ I agreed, so I took the watch from Volenko and I intended to put something on Zyriansky too, because Bankovsky was always for that, but I told him that nobody would believe anything against Zyriansky.”

When he had finished Zakharov asked him: “What made you do it? Was it for money?” ‘ “What do I want money for? It was all because of Bankovsky. He talked about my father: ‘your dad used to live well and now you’ve lost everything because of the Soviet power.’ Well, I listened to him and did everything he wanted. Of course, I was a fool. What’s my father to me, I never even think about him....”

“Really,” said Zyriansky, “you’ve made me feel quite sorry for you. Don’t you see I’ve got tears in my eyes?”

Ryzhikov looked at Zyriansky and turned away. He saw no tears in those eyes. He saw nothing but pitiless condemnation.

An hour later Kreutzer arrived, in response to a telephone call from Zakharov. He entered the room looking, as usual, full of life and ready to laugh but this time he did not laugh.

"Good afternoon, my friends!" he said in reply to the general salute. "So you've caught them, eh? Have you made a search? That's right. You've found the milling-tools? The callipers too? That's fine. Well, I'd like to have a private talk with the pair of 'em, if I may. I'd like to have a couple of words with Bankovsky alone, by the way."

He was not more than five minutes with Bankovsky in Zakharov's office.

"He's only a thread in the affair," Kreutzer said on his return. "It's up to the People's Commissariat of the Interior to untangle the whole knot. They'll both have to be sent to town. Give me six stout fellows, Alexei Stepanovich, who won't let them escape."

"Let them escape? That we certainly shall not do. Zyriansky for one, of course."

"I won't go with Zyriansky," said Ryzhikov hoarsely.

"Why not?"

"I won't, I tell you. He'll... he'll kill me."

Kreutzer turned gaily to Zyriansky.

"Really, Alyosha?"

Zyriansky paled and tightened his lips.

"I can't trust myself not to."

"Look at that!" said Kreutzer. "Who else then?"

"Chernyavin," said Zakharov.

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"Alexei Stepanovich, I won't kill him but I'll beat him all the way to town. For Volenko and for the whole colony."

"What's all this?" Kreutzer bellowed. This is outrageous! I order the following to go: Zyriansky, Chernyavin, Pokhozhai, who else... Bratsan, Porshnev ..."

"Me too," said Filka Shary.

"You're too young! Grow up a bit."

"That's what I'm always told! 'Grow up, grow up.'"

"Well, just go on growing... Klyushnev, you go. There you are, six of 'em. I'll give you a note. See you hand them over without a hair of their heads missing. Don't lay a finger on them, understand?"

All six boys rose to their feet and saluted as one.

"Very good, Comrade Kreuizer!"

"That's better! Just look at that gang of murderers! Well, boys, I congratulate you- Well done! Let me have a look at the heroes, the chief ones!"

Shary and Vanya planted themselves before Kreutzer, embarrassed by the general attention and the services they had rendered the community.

“So it’s these two! Vanya Galchenko! We’ve worked together, you know! We laid the foundation stone together, remember? And I know Filka well, we’re old friends. Smart lads! I shake your hands on behalf of the Soviet power.”

Kreutzer extended his strong broad hand and gave the boys’ little hands a real shake.

When this was all over and the arrested pair had been led away, when the stormy joyful general meeting closed and Kreutzer had left, Shary and Vanya brought to the office a little bottle containing the remains of the rare oil. Once again Shary made a speech.

“We only used it twice, Alexei Stepanovich. There’s no need for Igor to get offended. Besides, we lubricated his Samson Werke as well.”

Zakharov took a long serious look into the little boys’ eyes.

“You don’t have the slightest idea what wonderful people you are!” he said. “You’ll never understand that, which is a good thing for at least it will prevent you from getting stuck up!”

Filka and Vanya did not fully grasp what Zakharov was saying. They replied as the director had to be replied to.

“Very good, Comrade Director, we shan’t get stuck up!”

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We Will Remember

This short chapter in the history of the young people who formed the small community known modestly as the First of May Colony reached its end. And as a happy ending must always be celebrated triumphantly the colonists were unrestrained in their jubilation about their victory. It was good to arrive at the October Revolution celebrations with no more enemies left in the colony—neither at the factory nor in the detachments. They could now look one another in the eyes openly and feel no shame when seeing each morning the two narrow pennants flying above the battlements of the main building.

Towards the end of October, Vitya Torsky relinquished his post as Secretary of the Commanders’ Council to go to study at the Dzerzhinsky Naval Engineering Institute in Leningrad.

Igor Chernyavin is the one for the job,” Ilya Rudnev said, when the time came to elect Torsky’s successor. “He’s a far-sighted fellow. He was the only one to warn us that Ryzhikov was our enemy and we didn’t believe him. He’s the kind of secretary we need, that’s certain.”

And it seemed that all were of the same opinion because Igor was elected unanimously. He handed over the eighth detachment “to its new commander, Sancho Zorin, and went and sat next to Zakharov to help lead the colony in its difficult work. His first concern was to get Volenko back into the colony. Volenko’s address had been carefully preserved in the fourth detachment’s secret files. To Poltava was sent a three-man delegation amply financed by Zakharov. The delegates took Volenko a written invitation to return, drawn up by the general meeting, his railway fare and a new parade

uniform. Quite rightly, Vanya Galchenko who had the foresight to ask Volenko for his address was chosen as one of the delegation.

Volenko returned to the colony on the anniversary of the Revolution. It probably surprised the townspeople to see the colonists head for the railway station when they left the parade square, instead of going the other way, through Khoroshilovka back to the colony. The boys and girls lined up in the fine broad square in front of the station. The Commanders' Council, accompanied by Zakharov, walked to the platform to meet the train and when they came back to the square with Volenko they were greeted with musical honours. Two hundred pairs of eyes were turned towards Volenko and there was not one which was dry. The townsfolk looked at the colonists in surprise: why were these orderly detachments of boys and girls standing rigidly at the salute to the strains of the band? Why, too, were tears coursing down their cheeks? Only later when Zakharov ordered them to dismiss and everybody rushed forward to greet Volenko did people realize that it was joy, not grief that excited the colony on that day.

Volenko passed along the line of colonists, his straight firm mouth touched with a smile that expressed both his gratitude to his comrades and his pride in the colony that he could once again call his own. And when, later on, the colonists were back in formation Igor Chernyavin stepped forward and, oblivious to the crowd of spectators, happy and gay in their holiday attire, said: "We shall have more to say when we get home. All I want to do now is to ask Volenko to take over the duties for the day in the colony. It will be a pleasure for us to know that on this great day of celebration the commander of the first detachment is the one on duty."

And out there on the square Rudnev and Volenko drew themselves up to attention in front of the director.

"Comrade Director!" cried Rudnev. "I am handing" over the duties of commander on duty to commander of the first detachment Volenko."

"Comrade Director!" responded Volenko. "I am taking over the duties of commander on duty from commander of the tenth detachment Rudnev."

How deep was the joy of all on hearing Volenko's voice again! To many it seemed as if all that had passed was a dream that Ryzhikov had never existed, that the colony had never known sorrow in all its existence. And more joyous still was the march homeward through the festive town, feet all but dancing to the gay silvery strains of the band, and the sight, caught by a corner of the eye, of the people on the pavements gazing with admiration at the colonists, so proud of their past successes, so confident that they would repeat them in the future.

That evening Kreutzer attended the meeting. After congratulating the colonists on the anniversary and on Volenko's return to their midst he said to them:

"Dear friends! The main thing is not to get complacent. You've learned for yourselves how hard it is to fight against your enemies. Don't forget that Ryzhikov was commander of the first detachment. Do you remember how you stood to attention before him and said 'Very good, Comrade Commander on duty'? And in fact he was no comrade of yours at all, and if he had duties they were those of an enemy. Well, now you know what an enemy is and how much harm he can do. Your enemies will never come to you in a colourless and dingy guise. They will always seek to dazzle your eyes and worm their

way into your heart. They will try to make themselves popular, do all kinds of things for you so that you will consider them your comrades. You have had a good lesson but you must keep a careful look-out. There's a fellow called Podvesko among you. From what I've heard he committed a misdemeanour and you let him off without any kind of punishment. That was correct—he went wrong because he did not know any better. Keep your eyes skinned in future too, discriminate correctly. It's essential for your own sake and for the sake of your Soviet country!"

Now the colonists saw the essence of the problem behind Kreutzer's every word. They realized how dangerously and furtively their enemies could work against them and they braced themselves to oppose them with their unconcealed and deadly hatred so as to nip the treachery in the bud.

Not a month was to pass before they were to see, together with the whole land, the death-dealing hand of the enemy strike a terrible blow. It was something they were to remember for the rest of their lives.

That day it happened that Zakharov came out of his quarters late. He had been working long the night before, and on his way to bed told the sentry that he would not attend inspection the next morning. True, he heard reveille blown but did not hurry to get up. When he eventually went out into the courtyard he paused as usual near the door and cast his eyes over the front of the building. It was still dark but the sky was purpling in the east. The flags on the battlements of the main building were just visible in the twilight but.. something odd was happening to them. One of the flags suddenly began to drop on its mast. It showed black against the red dawn sky. As it dipped it jerked and the narrow end of the pennant stuck up. Then, half-way down the mast, it stopped and the second flag began to fall. Zakharov racked his brains... December 2... no, there was nothing special about that date... something must have happened! He made for the door at the run. Crossing the flower-garden he bumped into Igor.

"What's the matter? Why are the flags at half-mast?"

"It's Kirov ... Alexei Stepanovich! Kirov has been killed!"

"What?! How do you know?"

"It's just been announced over the radio...."

Zakharov dashed indoors. A confused crowd of colonists filled the vestibule. Voices were hushed, there was a feeling of tension, a girl crouched on the bench, sobbing. Oksana Litovchenko, who was on duty that day, pushed her way through the crowd towards him.

"I can't be on duty today, Alexei Stepanovich."

"What do you mean 'you can't'?"

"I can't, I can't."

Zakharov realized that she was too distracted to answer him properly. The girl dropped in tears on the bench, repeating the words that had lost all meaning for her.

"I can't, oh I can't, Alexei Stepanovich!"

He bent over her and started to unpin her arm band. The boys looked at Oksana in silent alarm; there was a fixed strained look in their eyes. They were determined to bear their grief like men. Zakharov handed Igor the arm band.

“Who’s to take over?” Igor asked him.

“Take over?” Zakharov echoed, absently. “Take over. . . . What’s it you’re asking about?”

“Who’s to be on duty?”

“Aha ...” Zakharov was trying to understand but something was impeding him. At last he saw daylight.

“You take over yourself. Do you understand, you be on duty today. Now.... We must call a general .meeting immediately. The band too. Oh yes ... we shall need crape... send somebody to my rooms for it... .crape for the flag.”

Zakharov walked into his office. There, as in the Council, the settees were occupied by little boys and girls sitting quite silent with their arms between their knees. They sat close together without stirring. When Zakharov came in they rose to their feet mechanically and saluted, then dropped back listlessly on the settees and folded their arms again. Zakharov took no notice of them at first and sat at his desk wrapped in thought.

“Tell me exactly what you heard over the radio,” he asked at last.

The little boys, prompting each other as they tried to piece the story together, told him what had been announced. Meanwhile the general meeting and the band were being called together. The settees quickly emptied but somehow even the rush to the meeting room lacked its usual spirit that day.

The meeting opened in oppressive silence. The banner, now draped in black crape, was saluted. Then all eyes were turned on Zakharov.

“Comrades!” he began. “We have suffered 0 terrible misfortune.... A ghastly crime has been committed.... It seems that we had no idea what foul enemies we have, how much venom and hatred is still felt towards us, towards our state and our leaders. Now you understand how things are, I hope, Comrade Colonists.”

“We understand!” came the answer of the two hundred colonists, speaking as if with a single voice. It was a quiet and thoughtful answer.

The band, forty strong, played the revolutionary funeral march “You fell a victim in the fatal struggle...” followed by the solemn grievous strains o! Chopin’s “Funeral March.” The black-edged banner of red velvet was dipped. Secretary of the Council Igor Chernyavin stepped forward and said:

“Our life, and our happiness too, is in our hands, comrades. They wish to snatch them from us. They are shooting at us! What did they think, those scum who shot Kirov? They thought: some we shall kill, others we shall frighten, and others we shall deceive! That is the way they thought! And why? So that they could bring back the old way of life which they like so much, because they count on being the bosses in that way of life and making us slave for them! But are we going to slave for them? These rats do not know that we have grown used to living like human beings, like real people who can never again become their slaves. Never again, Signori! That is the answer we must give them. I know,

colonists, that you will agree with me when I say that we will always remember Comrade Kirov, not only while we are here in the colony but later on when we are grown-up. We will always remember him, and who killed him and what for! We won't forgive this crime, we shall show no mercy, we shall sweep aside anyone who stands in our way. But let me say this too: we ought not to wait for things to happen, we oughtn't to wait for anything. That's what we must think of every day, every minute. Now we know even better what the purpose of our factory is!

Our factory, comrades, is our weapon in the struggle, it means new people, people who will not let us down and who will forgive nothing. Nesterenko has left us to build aircraft, 'Kolos has gone to the university, Misha Gontar has taken his place at the wheel—not one of them is ever going to be anyone's slave. Yes, we will remember this day. I don't know how to put it but I would like this day to serve as a call of alarm which will always sound in our ears, if you understand what I mean. I want to propose that our banner should remain here dipped near the bust of Stalin till the moment of Comrade Kirov's funeral, and that we should mount a guard of honour. Then every colonist will remember how he stood on guard beside our banner."

Two days and two nights hung the velvet banner of the First of May Colony, and day and night, every quarter of an hour, the guards of honour beside it were changed. They stood at attention in twos with their rifles at their side, wearing parade uniforms without the usual white collar which was removed as a sign of mourning. Till late at night the colonists sat on the bench against the walls of the Quiet Room while the small fry clustered on the steps below the bust of Stalin and spoke in whispers.

And when the time came to bear away the banner from the Quiet Room, and the narrow red flags were hoisted to full mast and flew once more over the battlements, it was with fresh passion and perseverance and with deeper understanding that the colonists hastened to their machines and school desks and submitted to the exacting discipline of the collective. They continued their forward march looking this way and that and seeing far, far ahead, almost out of sight in the mists of distant lands and frontiers the great front of the socialist offensive that was sweeping forward with them.

. Life with its struggle goes on. There is joy, crowning the victory in that struggle, and love. Hand in hand with Oksana advances Igor Chernyavin, an Igor whose big mouth now expresses not only humour but strength. And Wanda Stadnitskaya, wife and mother, shock-worker in the factory, advances too, and there is always a smile on her face now when she recalls her' past misfortunes. And Vanya Galchenko—and all the fourth detachment—the gallant invincible fourth—march on as the silvery music rings out and beside them march other detachments, the great detachments of the working people of the Soviet Union—the men and women who made history in the 'thirties.

APPENDIX

A REPORT OF A DISCUSSION ABOUT *LEARNING TO LIVE* BETWEEN THE AUTHOR AND A GROUP OF READERS,

HELD AT THE S. M. KIROV PALACE OF CULTURE
IN LENINGRAD*

* It took place on October 18, 1938. The report is based on stenographic notes taken at the meeting.—*Ed.*

A. S. Makarenko's Opening Speech

I take it for granted, comrades, that all or most of those present have read *The Road to Life*, but that many of you have probably not read any other book. *Learning to Live*, which is a sequel to it. So I shall not talk about *The Road to Life* but confine myself to providing you with some explanation of the second book.

In *The Road to Life* I dealt with the question of how best to describe man in a community, how to describe man's struggle with himself, and the struggle of the community for its worth and its personality, which are struggles that can be more or less tense. In *Learning to Live* I had quite another object in view. I wanted to describe that wonderful community in which I had the pleasure of working, to describe its inner movements, its life and its surroundings.

It was a happy community in a happy society; and 'I wanted to show that the happiness of that community, often manifested in highly poetic forms, included struggle, but not so tense a struggle against obvious obstacles and enemies as we were involved in at the Gorky Colony. This struggle was of a more subtle character, for it was a conflict of men's inner forces and often manifested itself in tones and shades that almost escaped notice. This raises very important and complicated questions. It was only during my work in the Dzerzhinsky Colony that I realized — and I felt it very keenly — how little I mastered the complex process of educating the new man.

This process is not confined to one particular community; it takes place in the whole of our socialist society. It is the process of labour and human relations, the growth of the human being itself, and, finally, the countless and extremely subtle relationships between the young people themselves, and between the other members of the colony. I tried to show all that. It may be that I have failed to include it all within the compass of *Learning to Live*. It is a problem that cannot be solved in one generation. But I discovered that the boys and girls of that community were, first and foremost, citizens of their country. And that is the principal difference between our children and those of any other society in the world.

That is what I was most anxious to show, and whether I have succeeded is for you to judge. It often happens that while you may have much to say you do not succeed in actually saying it. Only the reader can judge whether the writer has been successful.

The Author's Closing Speech

Without wishing to boast I must say that we made much more progress in our colony than you seem to think.

I have never considered the children in my care to be "moral defectives." There was never anything defective, about them.

Some of my readers would have liked to see us teachers suffering agony while we transformed the street-waifs into new people, but there was no agony and no transforming. I scored some real successes at my colony; I reached the position when I was able to take groups of fifty homeless children straight from the railway station. We only took those who were actually on the trains. I would go and get them in the evening and by the next day I, and everybody else, would have stopped worrying about how the newcomers were behaving in the colony.

You call that a miracle. No, it's not a miracle; it's our Soviet reality, pure and simple.

What is written in *Learning to Live* is the plain truth, even to the names and the incidents and dialogue recorded there. We received visits from many delegations, foreign as well as Soviet. The foreigners were surprised and incredulous. But our Soviet people believed what they saw; they understood that our community was a happy one. During the whole eight years there was not one black day, not a single misfortune.

I don't want to call that a miracle. That is normal. And just because I took part in the life of the colony and saw and felt every one of its nerves working, I feel that I have the right to insist that that was so. I am not inventing anything. ...

If you have a really well-organized children's community then you can work miracles indeed.

Reference has been made to the film "The Road to Life" where the children, you say, were corrupted and demoralized. But I would like to say that once you put a child into normal conditions of life he will become normal himself within a day. Is that not true happiness? What else do you want? That is what will always happen in a well-run children's community. All children are fond of discipline.

I never permit myself to distort Soviet reality, comrades, by inventing bad people for the asking of our critics. No, I never let myself do that.

Now let me answer some of the points raised.

One comrade who has read *Learning to Live* raised questions which, though they show him to be a thoughtful reader, suggest that not everything has been clear to him. I am sorry that time does not permit me to reply to him at length. Briefly, then.

Why didn't I try to keep Volenko in the colony when he decided to leave? Yes, according to all the traditional rules of pedagogy I should have kept him there. But according to our Soviet pedagogy he should not have been prevented from leaving. I am not afraid of taking risks and I know that a change of environment can be very useful sometimes and it may be useful sometimes to experience a shock. That is why I did not want to restrain Volenko. He felt that he was personally responsible for the cases of theft in his detachment. The colony considered him responsible. It is absolutely against the tradition of the old pedagogical science to consider the commander of a detachment in a children's colony responsible for thefts like that. But there were thieves in Volenko's detachment because he was a soul-hearted fellow, ready to forgive everything. He could not stay in the colony with an easy conscience, he just had to leave. It was Volenko's own demand on himself. I knew how very difficult it would be for him to leave the colony but I wanted him to go through all that. It is a fine thing when someone makes great demands of himself, it educates him. Many of our teachers have the mistaken notion of not wanting to overburden children with demands on themselves and, in general, or not

wanting to overburden children at all, just providing them with universal rules. I don't agree with that and that is why I did not prevent Volenko from leaving the colony.

What sort of a fellow is Ryzhikov? He is not a conscious wrecker but some sort of vermin by nature.

Why didn't I take any steps to reform his nature? The main steps were the influence of the colony as a whole, of society, of the collective. No persuasions on the part of any teacher, myself included, could equal the power of a properly organized and proud community.

Ryzhikov could not become assimilated even into our community. Unfortunately I cannot go into details about that in the time at my disposal, and I did not deal with the question at length in my book. But one day I shall write a long and serious book about it, a book on the methods of communist education.

Now a few words about re-education. One comrade asks why I did not show the re-education of Igor's character. That would have been difficult to do because there was no re-education. I had no morally defective people. The children who came to me were unhappy; life had been difficult for them in the circumstances in which they had been living. I don't believe that there are any people you can call morally defective. Just give them' normal living conditions demand certain obligations from them, provide them the opportunities to fulfil those obligations and they will become ordinary people, living in full accordance with human standards.

I think, comrades, that it is with defective methods, not defective people that we ought to concern ourselves.

I have been handed an interesting note asking me to say something about my attitude towards the teaching fraternity.

If by this is meant teachers as a whole then I must say that in the colony our relations could not have been better, I was very fond of all the teachers.

But if the question refers to those people who for some reason or other considered themselves the "oracles" of pedagogical science, then our relations with them are notorious.

I stand for an attitude of social responsibility in teaching. When I have a child to teach I must know exactly what I want to create. I want to be responsible for what my colleagues and I are producing—for the future engineers and masters of their trades, for the whole organization, for the pilots and students and teachers of the future. It is I who am responsible for that production.

But if you are to be- responsible for your production you must know at every step in your life as a teacher what you want and how you are going to get it,

Among the leading figures in our pedagogical science there have been enemies of the people who made liberal use of that vicious logic according to which, certain methods are bound to have certain results, and are for that reason good methods. This kind of logic did not even admit the test of practice.

I repeat, if a child goes wrong it is not the child who is to be blamed but the method of education.

In *The Road to Life*, published in 1933, I stated my attitude towards the pedagogues: I have always loathed them and have never made any secret of that fact. They were afraid to meet me. Once they wanted to inspect the way our colony was organized and started asking the children such questions as: "Imagine that you have a boat and it sinks, what will you do?" To which the children replied: "We haven't got a boat so we shan't do anything!"

There is an interesting question about Zadorov (A character in *The Road to Life*) "Do you really think that your method was successful?" I am asked. Of course I do not. It has never occurred to me to think so. I was desperate and helpless. If it had been a question of anybody else but Zadorov it is possible that the whole affair would have ended disastrously, but Zadorov was a noble soul, he understood how desperate I felt and found the power in himself to stretch out a helping hand to me and to say "All will be well." Isn't that clear? If I had raised my hand against, let us say, Volokhov, he might have knocked me down. I was a participant in the incident but Zadorov was the victor and it was only thanks to him and his support that I maintained my authority. That is where the success lay, not in the fact that I boxed his ears. Striking a blow is no method. No, that was a sign of desperation.

I have been asked what subject I taught before I took over the colony. I taught history in a school.

Where am I working now? Nowhere, partly for health reasons, and partly for other reasons. I am only writing 'now'.

Where would I like to work? I should like to work in a normal school, so-called. Children with families are a thousand times more 'difficult to teach than street-waifs. The waifs had nobody else but me while school children always have a father and mother 'behind them. For that reason I'd very much like to teach normal children.

I am asked what type of punishment I favour. I don't favour any kind of punishment but I used it in the colony. Take, for instance, the case of Klyushnik who was commander of the first Komsomol detachment and who was punished much more than anybody else. Why was that? It was because he was a commander on whom great responsibilities devolved and who had much more to answer *for* than anybody else. Such punishment which simultaneously shows respect for the recipient and makes demands on him I consider feasible, so long as it is applied sensibly. But, generally speaking, I never used punishment on a broad scale. I had a pretty good collective to deal with.

What was my contribution to the compilation of the text-book on pedagogical science? I was invited by the professors to help with this book. I agreed on the one condition that they would tell me whether we should be writing about the pedagogies, of today or of the future. They said that it was not-possible to write about the pedagogical science of the future. So I answered them that if we are to write about the pedagogies of today, life will overtake *us* and the result will be that we shall have written about yesterday's methods.

The observation that my *Book for Parents* is unnecessary is to-some extent erroneous; all I have to say on that matter is that although parents are grown-up people they do not always know how to treat their own children. It's wrong to think that grown-ups-have nothing to learn.

It's, equally erroneous to think that a grown-up girl should not kiss a man who has helped her. Why shouldn't she? What's reprehensible about that?

Somebody asked what Igor is doing now. Igor is studying, he is on good terms with his father whom he now respects, and he loves Oksana whom, I expect, he will marry.

I cannot on this occasion dwell on the big problems that have-been raised but I should like to say that your attention and your suggestions and observations are most helpful and that I shall make use of them in my work.

End